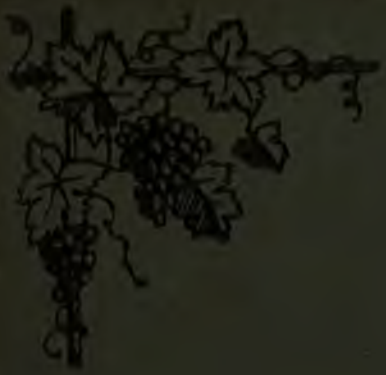

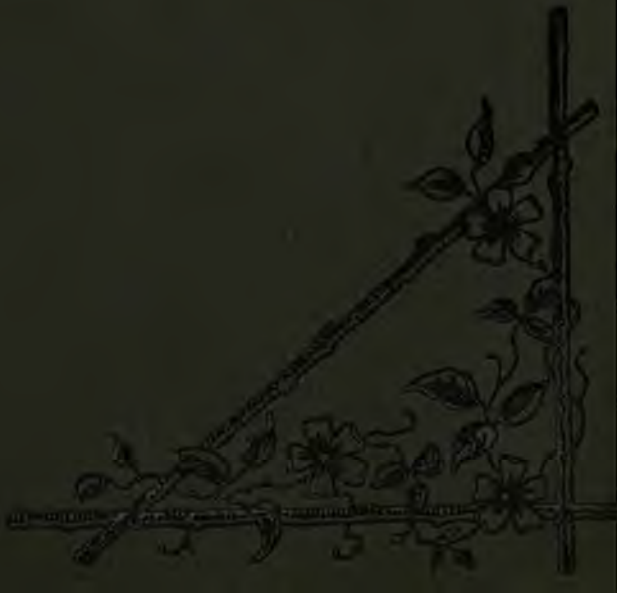

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M. E. Fawcett

MARY ELWOOD.

A Novel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

J. M. BARKER.

VOL. I.

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CHAPTER I.

The child is father of the man.

FROM its birthplace in the wild solitudes of the Northumbrian Border Fells, the river Brent wanders forth by lonely moorland and bleak hillside, passing here a fertile "haugh" and solitary farm-house, there a border castle or keep, relic of stormier days. Trending eastward, it leaves behind it heather and bracken, and after a restless course over rock and boulder and under fir-topped cliffs, spreads into a broad river with divided streams, and flows tranquilly through a wide

alluvial valley, laid so flat and lying so low as to be liable to inundation whenever a sudden thaw or rain "up west" brings the river down in a flood.

Spring is the time to see this reach of the vale of Brent in full beauty, for it is on the borders of the coal-measures, and later in the year a dusky hue clouds grass and foliage.

But though chimney and shaft are not far to seek, they are unobtrusive, and do not destroy the harmony of the smiling landscape or disfigure the small town of Brentham, which lies south of the river, grouped round its church and one or two imposing buildings of early date.

Half a mile to the west, hidden from the old coach road by the trees bordering the drive and the high walls of the back premises, stands a large square house hight Elwood Grange.

The name is at the present time a misnomer. It still belongs to an Elwood, but

the farm-buildings adjoining the stables and the fields surrounding the garden have been let.

Old Mr. Elwood, as he was called by Brentham people many years after he had been laid to rest in a quiet corner of the churchyard, had had one hobby, though otherwise known as a shrewd and successful man of business. Whenever he was not at his bank, he might be found amongst cows and pigs, or surveying the last dynasty in the poultry-yard—Spanish, Brahmas, white Leghorns had each their day, to be killed off or given away in turn. But though his eggs cost him on an average twopence apiece, and his pigs had excellent appetites, if the mental relaxation afforded by his farming be added to the profit side, this hobby was by no means an expensive one. While the father had been young and robust at sixty, his son, the present occupier, was old at fifty-five.

This son was a man of very different tastes.

Studious, refined, unworldly, his dream from childhood had been of a university and clerical career, and it had been sorely against the grain that he had taken his place in the bank in deference to his parent's wishes. The sense that he had spent his labour for that which to his mind was of little value, was the only shade that fell upon his gentle, childlike spirit.

As soon as he had made ample provision for his family, he was glad to avail himself of the excuse of failing health to retire from business and devote his time to his children and his books.

His first wife, a south-country lady of good family, had died at the birth of his youngest child. Mr. Elwood was fondly attached to her, and his grief at her loss brought on a severe illness, which left him more or less of an invalid for the rest of his days. To the sorrow of his bereavement was added a constant anxiety in the charge of his little

motherless children, and as time wore on this care pressed more and more heavily upon him, until after three years he made up his mind to marry again, and asked the sister of a doctor in Brentham, a capable and managing person of a certain age, to be a mother to his "bairnies"—two boys, now ten and eleven, and three little girls, from five to eight.

The father had chosen for his sanctum a room overlooking the garden, and his writing-table was placed in the recess of the window, where the sound of his children's voices might reach him and he could stand to watch them scampering across the lawns and kiss his hand to the little daughter who seldom failed to look up to his window.

The children never tired of the garden; to them there was no more delightful place on earth. It was more like a plantation than a garden, full of mystery and seclusion, with long winding paths and wilderness retreats. From the house it looked boundless, for the

south wall which divided it from several park-like fields beyond, was hidden, partly by trees, partly by a thicket of privet and holly. One corner only was reserved for bedding-out, and the rest was given up to trees and evergreens and long borders filled with old-fashioned flowers.

At the time of my story gorgeous peonies were shedding spoon and fork-shaped petals over the beds, and irises and blue hyacinths brightened the borders. The reign of the lilac was over, signs of age were showing themselves in the blanched blossoms of the laburnum, and the red and white may had burst into full bloom.

The sun was shining brightly, just at its height, for it was between twelve and one o'clock. This was an hour at which the garden was seldom forsaken in fine weather, but to-day was the half-holiday, and the boys had gone to make small purchases in the town, that the precious afternoon might not

be encroached upon. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that Mr. Elwood, who had come out for a breath of air, could see no one to keep him company, the garden was not altogether deserted.

Out of sight of the house ran a small stream, dignified in olden times by the title of the river Arlett. It had now lost its name, and, further, had been intercepted on its way to the Brent, and made to do duty at one of the tanyards in Brentham. But it had been subjected to no such unworthy treatment when it reached the garden of Elwood Grange, and flowed limpid and clear over a stony bed between two steep banks, faced with stone slabs where they met the water.

On one of these banks, half hidden by long grass and buttercups, sat a curious little figure, holding her panting sides. Her cheeks were flushed, and her large brown eyes gleamed through the wild locks that fell over her face. She scarcely waited to regain her

breath before she was on her feet again and climbing the bank. Then she took a run down and jumped, not quite across the stream, but near enough to the opposite bank to graze her knee and tear a hole in her pinafore against the stone facings. A rueful look at the pinafore, a momentary inspection of the injured place, and she recrossed the water and limped up the bank, holding her sore knee. As she was preparing to sit down again, the ten minutes bell sounded from the house, so drawing herself up, she looked at the stream, and clasping her hands with an air of great determination, made a run and landed triumphantly on the other side. One more scramble over the stones to pick up her hat and she was off towards the house, choosing the path which led past the vinery and hoping to reach the nursery unseen.

But she was not to be so fortunate, for, as she passed the vinery, who should emerge from it but her father; and whom should she

see coming down from the house to meet him but the master of the Grammar School?

The child crept behind a round box tree while the two gentlemen shook hands, and the schoolmaster began —

"I came to inquire after Tom. He has come home, I hear."

"Yes, I saw him; but he has gone out again. Has he been troublesome?"

"Only bringing mice with him and setting them free in the schoolroom."

"Dreadful boy! He said you had kept him in and forgotten him, so he came away."

"I gave him a hundred lines and left him locked up. When I went back at half-past twelve the bird had flown. He had made a ladder of forms and dropped out of the high window."

"The rascal!" exclaimed Mr. Elwood. "I wonder he didn't break his legs!"

"I'm glad he's no worse. Please tell him, with my compliments, that I had *not* for-

gotten him, and shall not forget him on Monday. Now I must go, for I am in Mrs. Elwood's black books already for spoiling dinner more than once."

His companion smiled. Punctuality could not be reckoned amongst Mr. Elwood's virtues, and a talk with Mr. Spencer was one of his greatest pleasures.

Mr. Elwood would have taken no inconsiderable place amongst scholars, but though he often pined for intercourse with kindred minds, he was far too modest and retiring to court their society. So it had come to pass that when, on the resignation of the former master of the Grammar School, a mere stick, a young man fresh from Cambridge with classical honours, was secured to supply his place, Mr. Elwood struck up at once an intimate friendship with him, delighted to find one whom he could treat with fatherly familiarity, while on intellectual matters he deferred to him—such was his humility.

It was with great satisfaction that he confided the education of his boys to his friend, and he looked anxiously for some indication that they shared his own tastes. But ten-year-old Tom, the young scapegrace already mentioned, though by no means devoid of wits, exercised them chiefly in getting into mischief; and Alf, a year older, though as plodding and conscientious a boy as one could wish to see, gave no promise of ability.

"If Alf only had Mary's brains!" the father would often lament.

Mary—the little lassie behind the box tree—was her father's pet and chief companion. The governess had found the child, with her strange questions and impatient desire to be at the bottom of everything, too much for her, and unmanageable to boot. To relieve her, Mr. Elwood now devoted two hours daily to teaching his little girl—two happy hours, for never had pupil a more patient and pains-

taking teacher, or teacher a more eager and intelligent pupil; and Mary, though considered an intractable child, would heed her father's slightest word.

Mr. Elwood still lingered talking to his friend, and Mary, fidgeting with impatience, expected every moment to hear the second bell ring. It was with feelings of thankfulness that she saw them move towards the house.

But her father had noticed something white behind the shrub, and looked round as he passed.

"Why, Mary, what have you been doing?" he exclaimed in astonishment.

The poor child, overwhelmed with confusion at being discovered in hiding, and ashamed of her bespattered condition, shook her head vigorously at her father. But it was too late to hide or run away. Mr. Spencer had turned round, and she came forward with her cheeks in a blaze, holding

out her little muddy palms to show that it was impossible to shake hands.

"Where have you been, you naughty pussy, to make yourself in such a state?" said Mr. Elwood, laying hold of her locks.

"I got into the stream."

"What were you doing there?"

"I was jumping it. Tom said I couldn't. Please let me go, papa; I shall be late," she implored.

He released her, and she was off like a shot, while the father remarked with a smile, as he watched the retreating figure—

"You can easily believe that we have our hands full."

Further trouble awaited poor Mary. On reaching the house, she turned a corner and ran straight into the arms of her step-mother at the foot of the stairs.

Questioning and explanation followed, but the latter did not prove satisfactory, so the verdict was passed—

"You're a very naughty girl, Mary, and you may have your dinner upstairs. Just look at your pinny! And a great girl like you! But you don't care how you spoil your clothes and waste papa and mamma's money."

Mary did not cry, or even look distressed. She stalked upstairs full of a purpose, and submitted quietly to the nurse's attentions, accompanied though they were by the echo of her step-mother's scolding.

On similar occasions she had refused to touch her dinner, but her mind was too much occupied for sulks, and she ate her meat silently, despatching it, I fear, with far less than the forty bites which Mrs. Elwood was in the habit of demanding for each mouthful. As soon as she had finished she jumped down from her chair, and, saying that she did not want any pudding, hurried on hat and jacket and began to rummage in her morning dress for her purse.

"Miss Mary, you are not to go to the stream again. I can't have it. I never seed such a child for getting into mischief. Just look at Miss Effie! She's a little lady, she is! She don't go for to be always messing her dress in the stream or climbing the trees like a great boy."

"She daren't climb the trees! not even the holly tree, and it's quite easy, only it pricks. But I am not going near the stream; it's all right," added Mary, too much afraid of being stopped to bandy more words with nurse.

She went out by the back door, that she might not be seen from the dining-room, and ran along the road to Brentham, until she came to a draper's shop. Here she went in and asked the price of some pinafores in the window.

The draper's assistant, recognising her as one of the children from Elwood Grange, stared with astonishment, and Mary, thinking

him very slow of comprehension, repeated her question impatiently.

"Isn't there one for two shillings?" she asked, finding them beyond her means. "It must be a pretty one, too, prettier than what I've got on."

The man succeeded in finding one to suit her ladyship, and hugging her parcel, Mary ran home.

Dinner was over, and she walked into the dining-room, and without a word handed her purchase to her step-mother.

"What is this, Mary?"

"A pinafore, mamma. I have bought it."

"You need not have done that. I only want you to be more careful in future."

"You cannot say that I waste your money," said the child, proudly.

"Mary, this is nothing but a display of temper! Take it away, and on Monday I shall go with you to the shop to return it."

That it was a display of temper Mary was

perfectly aware, but she chose to consider herself aggrieved, and feeling naughtier than ever, walked straight upstairs to the nursery, where, except in the height of summer, there was always a fire, and threw the parcel into the flames. The deed was no sooner done than she repented, but it was too late, and she watched it burn until nothing was left but the ashes.

Then, putting aside the thought of consequences, she went down to look for her brothers.

"Tom, I did it!" she cried eagerly, as soon as she found them.

"Did what?" said Tom, curtly.

He was busy just then, and his schoolmaster's message and his father's reproof had not put him in the best of humours.

"I jumped the stream!"

"Of course; it was easy enough."

"You said I couldn't do it!"

"I only said it to tease you."

"Then you told a lie on purpose to get me scolded."

"Silly! I didn't suppose you would try."

"And it *wasn't* easy."

"Easy enough. Effie could have done it—Gertie could," replied Tom, disdainfully, roused by her fierce looks.

"They couldn't!" screamed the child passionately. "Tom, you're a mean liar, and I hate you!" and she rushed out of the room.

Poor Mary! she had borne bruises, self-reproach, even scolding, with tolerable equanimity. But to have the fruit of it all snatched from her was more than she could endure, and her little soul writhed under a sense of injustice and wrong.

"My, what a temper!" said Tom when she had left the room.

"It's all your fault, Tom. You say things on purpose to provoke her," said his brother.

"Well, she's no right to get into a wax about nothing. I say, Alf!" he exclaimed,

after a pause, "what was that papa read about this morning that blew the people's noses and fingers off?"

"Dynamite. Why?"

"Oh! yes; and it went off with being touched, didn't it? Dyna—dyna—what, Alf?"

"Dynamite. What do you want to know for? You arn't to go and get any," said Alf, alarmed.

"My goodness! no. We've got enough of it already," replied Tom.

Late in the afternoon Mary crept downstairs. The garden door was open, and the sound of voices was borne in upon the scented air. She stole nearer and nearer until she stood at the door. "I spy," rang out from a hidden corner, and Alf rushed past, making for his bay. But he had caught sight of his sister, and pulled up at once.

"Come along; we are having such fun.

Maurice is here; he has been asking for you."

The child hung back, but Alf took hold of her hand and drew her out.

"Why, Mary, I thought you were lost. Come and be on my side," said Maurice Hughes, a friend and schoolfellow of the boys, who generally spent the half-holiday at Elwood Grange.

"Oh! I say, are we going to have Miss Dynamite on our side? She'll explode in a minute and blow our noses off!" cried Tom.

"Dinimite. Blow our nothith"—lisped rosy-faced Gertie.

"Tom calls *you* dynamite," said Effie.

Mary flushed angrily, and, unobserved by Maurice and Alf, who were rearranging sides, marched off down the path with her head high and her heart full.

"Where's Mary?" asked Maurice, turning round.

"She's gone away; she doesn't want to play," explained Effie, complacently.

"Oh! nonsense; why not?"

"Tom called her dynamite, because she gets into such tempers," said Effie again.

"Where is she?"

Nobody knew.

"You go on and play without me," said Maurice, and ran down the path.

He went all round the garden to no purpose, but nothing daunted, began his search again, calling Mary's name as he went along.

At one end of the garden was a high wall covered with ivy spreading into thick boughs at the top. As Maurice passed, calling "Mary, Mary," he heard a faint "What is it?" and looking up, saw a face peeping out of the green.

"Where have you got to?" he exclaimed. "It's only owls that live in ivy. Come along down."

"No; I like to be here," said Mary, withdrawing her head.

"If you won't come down to me, I must come up to you," said Maurice, climbing up by the thick stems of the ivy. "Why won't you play with us?"

"I'm not going where I'm not wanted."

"Alf wants you and I want you."

"Tom doesn't."

"Oh! we don't care about Tom; he's only a stupid little boy. He likes to tease you."

"Teaching Gertie to call me that!" said Mary, swallowing a lump in her throat.

"She didn't know what it meant. Come along. I shan't go and leave you here amongst the sparrows. Look at that little fellow; I expect he wants to come to his nest. I wonder where it is?"

They peered about.

"Why, here it is, just near me!" exclaimed Mary; "and the poor little birds crying out for him. I'll get down;" and suiting the

action to the word, she scrambled down, quickly followed by Maurice. He put his arm in hers, and she allowed herself to be drawn slowly towards the lawn.

"Hullo!" began Tom, when she joined them, but Maurice marched up to him, and taking him by the shoulder, said in low but decided tones —

"Listen here. You hold your tongue, or I'll give you something you won't like."

"What do you mean?" returned Tom, defiantly.

"Never you mind. I mean what I say!" and Maurice turned on his heel and proceeded to choose sides with Alf for hide and seek.

Carried away by the spirit of the game, Mary forgot her troubles, and her shriek of delight rang through the garden as Alf, eluding her close pursuit, ran into the arms of little Gertie, who had been posted behind a tree close to the bay.

But her troubles were not yet at an end. As tea-time drew near, Mrs. Elwood came into the garden and called her.

"Find the pinafore, Mary. Sarah will leave it at the shop to-night, and you shall call about it on Monday."

Mary blushed over face and neck. She had had time to cool, and felt thoroughly ashamed of herself as she remembered the holocaust.

"I can't bring it, mamma," she said, confusedly.

"Why not. Where is it?"

"It is gone."

"Gone? Where? You haven't taken it back?"

"No, mamma."

"Mary, I insist upon your telling me where it is."

"I burnt it," she answered, with eyes fixed on the ground."

"Burnt it? On purpose?"

The child nodded.

"I really don't know what to do with you! I can't think what you will come to! How dare you give way to your temper as you do! I wonder you aren't afraid, you very naughty child!"

"It was my own, and I had a right to do what I liked with it," answered Mary proudly, roused to defend herself by her step-mother's tone.

"No, you hadn't," said Mrs. Elwood angrily, "and I mean you to remember this. Hold out you hand."

The hand was held out, and Mrs. Elwood slapped it "most emphatic."

"Now you may take your tea where you had your dinner. Go along."

The whole holiday spoilt! It was sad indeed, but Mary would not show her disappointment. She bore the slaps without wincing, and, without a word, turned and walked up the stairs with dignity. But as

soon as she reached the nursery her fortitude gave way, and she burst into a fit of crying. She would not touch her tea, and went to her own room, where she sat down by the window, sobbing at intervals, and thinking how sorry, were she to die, they would be to remember that they had banished her on the holiday.

The thought was so comforting that presently she dried her eyes and began to look about her. Her attention was attracted to a fly on the window-sill lying on its back and making frantic efforts to resume its normal position. By puffing gently, Mary helped it on its legs, and it flew away.

She then betook herself to that most fascinating diversion of watching the raindrops trickle down the window, and backing one large bead against another in its race to the bottom of the pane. So half an hour slipped away, and suddenly she discovered that the room was growing dark, not with legitimate

twilight, but from the heavy curtain of cloud that covered the sky.

Mary had an especial objection to the dark when she had been naughty. As a very little child, hearing one night a pattering noise, she had whispered to her nurse in awestruck tones —

"It's Conscience walking about the room."

So she stole downstairs and found that Maurice, who was a boarder at the Grammar School, had gone back to Mr. Spencer's, and that the others were playing round games. No one took any notice of her—Tom had had orders to that effect—so she joined them in their play, and the rest of the evening passed pleasantly enough.

When it came to bed-time Mr. Elwood drew her to him, and stroking her cheek, said with his gentle smile, half serious, half humorous —

"My Mary must remember that he that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city, or even jumpeth a stream."

Mary's lips quivered, and tears rose to her large dark eyes.

But Mrs. Elwood had overheard the remark, and said in her stiffest tones —

"Yes, indeed, I wish Mary *would* remember that."

The proud, defiant look came back to the child's face, and with a short "good-night" to her step-mother and an apology for a kiss, she left the room.

Thus ended a by no means exceptional day in the life of little Mary Elwood.

CHAPTER II.

> It is ten o'clock;
> Thus may we see how the world wags,
> 'Tis but an hour ago since it was nine.

ONE often hears it said that childhood is the happiest season of life. This may be true as a rule, but it is not the universal experience. We forget the peculiar troubles of childhood when we leave them behind, but they are neither few nor small.

There are the growing pains of mind and body; there are the manifold trials of the awkward age; and, worst of all, there is the burden of self-consciousness, a veritable "old man of the sea" to many and many a child.

In later life we acquire ballast, and throw off the recollection of small snubs and slights and of our own minor blunders and solecisms, things which weigh for days, weeks, even months, on the mind of a sensitive child.

Mary Elwood had her full share of such troubles, and, in addition, many brought on herself by naughtiness and rebellion. But for a time she had one haven of refuge. Her step-mother might scold, and Tom might tease, and Effie nag, and they might all "hate her," but she was still "papa's little girl," and he could find something in her to love in spite of her naughtiness.

So it was that when the blow came, the heaviest that can fall upon a home, and the loved and loving father went to his rest, it fell most heavily upon the child who had clung to him with almost idolatrous affection. For a long time she went about crushed and well-nigh heart-broken, but at twelve years old youthful life and energy make desperate

efforts to reassert themselves, and by degrees the high spirit and wild wilfulness returned. Mrs. Elwood found herself unable to cope with it, and in spite of Mary's earnest pleadings and tearful promises, determined to try the effect of the discipline of school.

Her school life was not happy, and it was with little regret that she saw it drawing to a close. Her keen hunger for love and a morbid readiness to believe herself an object of dislike produced a stiff, self-contained manner which repelled advances, and, though she had several devoted admirers amongst those who knew her well, she was not generally popular.

With her schoolmistress and the governesses she had at first won golden opinions, for her work was well and thoroughly done; but she frequently fell foul of the rules and, by some fatality, as frequently was found out and taken to task. On more than one occasion when she had incurred sharp reproof, the hasty temper, which had earned for her at

home the name of "Miss Dynamite," broke out, and she had answered back fiercely and defiantly. She made due apologies after these outbursts, but though her apologies were accepted, she thenceforth considered herself looked upon as a black sheep, and by her constrained manner checked any progress towards friendly intimacy between teacher and taught. This manner, which came over her when with people that she fancied did not care for her, was in itself a great trial. The more she fought against it, the more it grew upon her, until it seemed part of the air she breathed.

But her last term had come, and, as an embryo poetess of the schoolroom phrased it, the weeks had ripened into months, the term was about to drop off, and the girls were preparing to eat the fruit of their labours in the holidays.

It is packing day at Warwick House, and the long schoolroom hardly knows itself under

the altered conditions. Girls, apparently at a loose end, and in no wise dissatisfied with such a state of things, are amusing themselves as they think fit. Some are enjoying *tête-à-têtes;* one or two are sitting on the table—tell it not in Gath—leaning on their hands and swinging their feet, too full of thoughts of home to need other amusement, and in the further window a group are eagerly discussing the chances of the examinations.

"Which do you think will be first?"

"I haven't a notion. I vote for Ada; she's jolly."

"Oh! but Mary's jolly too."

"Aggie! she's awfully quiet."

"You don't sleep in her room. She just sends us into roars. I think she keeps her fun bottled up all day and lets it out when she gets upstairs. She's dreadfully miserable sometimes though"—

Here Aggie checked herself, and felt that she was treading on sacred ground, for she

preserved quite an awe-stricken recollection of waking in the night and hearing sobs from the next bed.

"Well, I don't like her. She's as proud as Lucifer, and if you saw her in a rage!"

The sentence was ended by a significant gesture.

"You may say what you like, Bella. She may be proud, but she isn't conceited, and I would much rather have a temper like hers than sulk half the day for nothing."

The retort carried too much of personal allusion to be pleasant, and Bella, muttering, "She's got a fine champion," left the group.

"Mary won't like to be anywhere but top," remarked a girl who had not yet spoken.

"No, she can't bear to be second in anything," said another; "but Ada deserves to be first. She has been grinding all the term, and Mary only began the last few weeks."

"I hope Mary will, anyhow," said a small, fair-haired child. "She's awfully good to me. She doesn't mind trouble a bit if she can help anybody."

"Do you think Maude has a chance?"

"Not the slightest, and she doesn't care. I don't believe Mary would mind being second to Maude. How infatuated she is about that girl! I can't bear her."

"She's pretty, and she's taking, I suppose."

"She's nothing to Mary. I call Mary beautiful. Aren't you pleased, Aggie?"

Aggie smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"Talk of an angel and you see his wings," she said, looking to the door, and forgetting that this particular angel had been the subject of conversation for a considerable time.

"We have been talking over the exams., Mary. Most of them think you will be first."

"I do hope you will," said her little fair-haired friend.

"Thank you, dearie," said Mary, bending to kiss the face upturned to hers.

The child stole her arms round her waist and looked up at her with loving and reverential admiration.

"Do you know where Maude is, Aggie?" asked Mary.

"I wish you wouldn't ask me that," returned Aggie, petulantly. "It is always Maude."

"You little jealous toad! Come along, then, and sit on the sofa with me; there's room for Flo too. I expect the bell to ring directly.

"I wish it would; I am in such a state of excitement. Heigh-ho!" yawned Aggie, who had taken advantage of the licence of breaking-up night to talk until the small hours. "Ah! there it is. Delightful sound!"

The bell was the signal for the girls to assemble in the dining-hall and arrange

themselves in a semi-circle according to age. In a few minutes Miss Merriman came in with the fateful papers in her hand.

A period of impatience followed while she delivered her usual address. It was thoughtful and earnest, and deserved an attentive hearing; but all were waiting eagerly to know the results of the examinations, and it was only when towards the end the address became more personal, and it was hoped that some clue might be given, that the assumed attention changed to eager interest.

A moment of breathless expectation as Miss Merriman unfolded the list, and then all eyes were turned upon Mary as her name was read out first. She coloured with pleasure. Miss Merriman congratulated her in a few kind words, and then business proceeded —"Ada Leigh second, Maude Blake third," and so on, until all knew what had been the result of their steady work or tardy cramming.

Then they dispersed, and gathered again in knots in the schoolroom.

"Darling Mary, I am so glad!" exclaimed Aggie, enthusiastically, throwing her arms round Mary's waist; while Flo sidled up to her and possessed herself of a hand, and several others added their congratulations.

Mary thanked them warmly, but her eyes were roving round the room, and presently fixed themselves upon a ladylike-looking girl of her own age, who was talking to Ada Leigh with her back to the group. Mary made a move in her direction, but at that moment the girl turned away, and saying, "Yes, if you like. You and I," hurried out of the room without noticing Mary.

"Where's Maude going?" asked one.

"I don't know. She seems to be great chums with Ada all of a sudden."

Mary lingered a few moments with her friends, then made her escape and went up to her own room. There she sat down on her

box, and the heroine of the schoolroom looked about as miserable as if her name had been read out at the bottom of the class. Presently tears came, but she brushed them away hastily as she heard a tap at the door.

It was opened by the young lady who had just before left the schoolroom; and lifting up her pretty hands in astonishment, she exclaimed—

"What! the conquering hero sitting on a box in solitude! This is public robbery; you ought to be downstairs."

Mary held out her arms, and was soon sobbing on her friend's breast.

"What is the matter?"

"I didn't want to be before *you,* Maude. I would rather have been last than that anything should come between us."

"My dear child, did you think I was jealous? I don't value myself or my scholastic attainments."

"I didn't know. You wouldn't speak to me."

"I didn't care to offer my congratulations with the crowd, but I will make as many curtseys as you like now;" and Maude jumped up.

"Pray don't," said Mary, smiling through her tears. "If you are pleased, it is all right."

"I have come all the way upstairs to tell you so—proof enough, isn't it? Now come down, and don't be so silly again. You spoil those pretty eyes of yours with crying. It isn't a becoming exercise, I assure you."

Mary dried her eyes and went down to the schoolroom, where she was besieged and drawn into the circle.

She could not resist a long, curious look round. Those walls could never keep her in again when the sunshine called her out. Those rules on the mantelpiece could never vex her more with their cramping restrictions. Already she seemed to breathe the atmosphere of freedom, and, throwing off the constraint of

her manner, she was her natural frolicsome self, and some of the girls, who had never liked her before, now began to think it was a pity she was leaving.

Mary did not agree with them, though she was sorry to say good-bye; and there was something strange and sad, even in the case of disagreeable girls, in the thought that she might never see them again.

She travelled home alone, and, for the first part of her journey, occupied herself with re-writing in imagination a large part of the closed page of her school life—re-writing it with more of freely-bestowed friendliness towards her schoolfellows, and more of affectionate confidence towards her schoolmistress; for Miss Merriman's parting words had disabused her of the idea that she was disliked as a black sheep, and the thought that her coldness might have hurt one whose only feeling towards her had been kindness had more than once brought tears to her eyes.

After a few hours' travelling, the outer world became attractive. Chimneys, furnaces, and crowded buildings were left behind, and the line ran through pleasant open country, with fields and woods and flowery railway banks. As she neared the north, thoughts of home, sweet home, crowded in thick and fast; and, almost before she knew where she was, the train stopped at Brentham Station.

"Here you are, old girl! Give me your encumbrances. Alf, see to the luggage. Polly, will you ride or walk?"

"What are you going to do, Tom?"

"One of us must walk. We only brought the pony and Johnny."

"Then we'll all walk."

"It *is* jolly to have you back," said Alf (who had despatched his business), drawing her arm in his, and giving it an affectionate squeeze. "Let's be off."

Mary stopped for a moment to speak to

Johnny, eliciting a shy smile of pleasure, and then set off at a brisk pace between her brothers.

Any one of the three might have attracted attention, and many eyes followed them through the streets of Brentham.

Alf, now in his second year at Oxford, was growing more like his father from year to year. He had the same light build and delicate features, the same fair hair and gentle blue-grey eyes; but his face was interesting rather from its sweetness of expression than from intellectual power.

Tom resembled his brother in the colour of his hair and eyes, but there the resemblance ended. He was over six feet high, with the frame of a young Hercules, and on his broad shoulders was set a thorough John Bull's head, save that a little of Paddy peeped through those wide-awake eyes. His nose was inclined to be a snub, and looked down patronizingly on the prominent chin, which Mary called his

bump of mischief. As for his mouth—well, it was Tom's mouth, and kept by him in strict order. It was seldom allowed a nearer approach to a smile than a saucy or sarcastic twitch at the corners. Its ordinary expression was grim, sometimes severe and but that, fortunately, Tom's eyes were not so well under control, and a genuine good nature shone through them, he might have passed for a less pleasant fellow than he was.

Mary was a thorough contrast to both her brothers. She had the dark-brown hair and eyes, cleanly-cut features, and clear complexion which belonged to her mother's family. It was a fine, frank, open face at all times, though too often spoilt by a petulant or dissatisfied expression; and, as she walked along between her brothers, full of the happiness of being with them again, it was a beautiful face and a sweet one too.

Mrs. Elwood was the first to welcome her. "Here you are, my child. Very pleased to

see you safe and sound. Wipe your feet, dear—here come the girls."

Downstairs at full tilt came Effie and Gertie, and Mary was half smothered with kisses. There was never any lack of affection for the first few days of the holidays.

"That will do, dears. Now, Gertie, take Mary's things upstairs; she can put them away afterwards; and Mary must come and have tea. We have been looking forward to having you home," continued Mrs. Elwood, as she took her into the dining-room. "I hope we shall all be very happy together."

"Of course we shall, mamma," replied Mary gaily, giving her an affectionate kiss; "how could we be anything else?"

CHAPTER III.

In all thy humours, whether grave or mellow,
Thou'rt such a touchy, testy, pleasant fellow,
Hast so much wit, and mirth, and spleen about thee,
That there's no living with thee, or without thee.

"HERE you are, Polly," said Tom, coming into the library one Saturday afternoon, and finding Mary curled up in an arm-chair, half-way through "Westward Ho!" "Come and play cricket."

Mary looked up mechanically, without answering. To all intents and purposes Tom might have spoken in Chinese, for she was far away on the Southern Seas, fighting the Spaniards with Amyas Legh.

"Don't begin that old trick. Put away the

book and come out. It will do you a lot more good."

"Can't you get one of the others?"

"Effie's no good, and Gertie's too fat. Come along; we want a field."

Mary was mentally active, but needed the spur of excitement to rouse her to physical energy. A game with her brothers was a great inducement, but there was more stirring work going forward under the bows of that Spanish galleon, and she would have elected to remain where she was. But she was essentially good-natured and unwilling to disappoint.

"I thought there was a match," she said, closing her book.

"There's been some hitch. The other fellows didn't turn up, so we came back."

"Who have you got there, then?" she asked, doubtfully.

"Tuts! only two shrimps. Here, anything will do;" and Tom took off his straw hat and patted it down on her head, sup-

plying himself with a cap out of his jacket pocket.

She found Alf waiting, and with him Walter and Henry Lawson, two nice lads of fifteen and sixteen, Tom's devoted slaves and satellites.

Mary fielded patiently for some time, until it came to Tom's turn to bowl.

"Do let me back-stop for Tom," she begged.

"You'd better not, Mary," said Alf; "you don't know what balls he sends!"

"I don't mind; let me try."

"Yes, she shall try, if she likes," said Tom; and Alf gave way.

"You hit them all," complained Mary to Walter, who was in.

"I feel bound to hit with you behind there, Miss Elwood."

But Walter did not take the next ball, and Mary contrived to stop it, though she let it go.

"Well stopped!" cried Tom.

"My goodness, that was a ball!" said Henry.

"Didn't it sting, Mary?" asked Alf.

Mary nodded and laughed—

"Send another."

The next was fatal. Walter threw down his bat, then, recollecting himself, picked it up and offered it to Mary.

"I shall soon be out," she said, as she took it. "Tom never let us bat when we were little; we always had to field."

"Don't believe her," said Tom. "Now, Polly, to begin with, do you want to break your fingers? Girls always have a trick of putting their forefinger down the bat."

"Yes, I forgot. How stupid."

"That will do. Now, Alf, peg away."

But Alf was straining his eyes to see through the laurels.

"Here come Mrs. Swan and nieces."

"Mother Grundy! She'll have a fit if she sees Polly playing cricket," said Tom.

"You'd better fly, Mary," said Alf. "You look very funny in that hat."

"Fly, indeed! She is quite welcome to have a fit if she pleases."

"I owe that Miss Manners a grudge, greedy thing!" said Tom. "When I was a boy, if there was anything nice to eat it was always 'Leave that for Miss Manners.'"

The ladies had come in sight, and Mary went forward to meet them.

"How do you do, Mrs. Swan? You see I am pressed into the service."

"Isn't it rather a severe exercise for a young lady, my dear? May I introduce my nieces, Miss Manners, Miss Julia Manners?"

"Do you often play cricket, Miss Elwood?" asked Miss Manners.

"I used to play with my brothers when I was small, but I haven't had a game for a long time."

"Are all these your brothers?" asked Miss Julia, as the four came up to shake hands with "Mother Grundy."

"No, only the two eldest."

Mary introduced them in turn.

"How do you do, Miss Manners?" said Tom. "I have never had the pleasure of meeting you before, but I know you very well by name."

"Really," smiled the young lady. "Then I suppose we must have a mutual friend?"

"I never tell secrets," answered Tom.

The Lawsons had disappeared into the background, fearing that Tom would upset their gravity.

"I am afraid mamma is out," said Mary, moving towards the house.

"Then don't let us take you in. I am sure my nieces would like to go round the grounds."

"You must sit down and rest first. Oh, here comes mamma."

Mary left the elders to talk, and proposed a

walk round the garden to the nieces. Alf was with Mrs. Elwood, and Tom meditated beating a retreat and leaving Mary to do the duties. But Miss Manners was not inclined to let him off so easily.

"What a delightful place this is, Mr. Tom!" she said, turning to him, while Mary walked on with Miss Julia. "I daresay you spend a great deal of your spare time in it. And perhaps you garden? Why, do you mean to say that is a stream? How very charming to have a stream in the garden! You fish, I am sure, Mr. Tom? Are there any fish in this stream?"

"Not that I know of. We found two pike here last winter, frozen to the ice."

"Do you say so? I suppose they were dead, then. Yes, of course they must have been frozen to death. Where could they have come from?"

"They were alive. A flood had brought them from the reservoir, I suppose?"

"Alive! I really couldn't have thought it possible. I hope you gave them their liberty, poor things! You couldn't have had the heart to eat them."

"No; we let them go. But I should think it would have been a nice change to be on the fire after having been so long in the ice."

Miss Manners looked up at him with a deprecating simper, then started afresh on the subject of fishing in general, upon which she knew about as much as the man in the moon, where, as there is said to be no atmosphere, one may suppose there is little fishing.

Mary, meanwhile, had been hearing Miss Julia's opinion of the neighbourhood and the people of Brentham, and, as she hated gossip, was not sorry to rejoin Mrs. Swan and Mrs. Elwood.

The visitors took their leave after a few minutes, during which Mrs. Swan found an opportunity of saying to Mary—

"I have been telling your mamma, my dear, that you looked so heated when we came. I am afraid you will take a chill some day if you indulge in such violent exercise. It is very kind of you to oblige your brothers, but there are other things to be thought of, you know."

To which Mary replied coldly —

"Thank you, Mrs. Swan. But I enjoy playing with them, and I am not in the least afraid of catching cold."

As soon as she had seen the visitors out of the gate she went in search of Tom, whom she traced by the sound of laughter to a favourite seat, where he had joined the Lawsons.

The voices ceased as she came in sight, and the boys got up to offer her a place.

"I won't sit down, thank you. I am sorry our game was interrupted. Is it too late to begin again?"

"I am afraid we must go," said Walter.

"If you really must go, then I will put on my things and take my parcel to Mrs. Robson's. You promised to come with me, didn't you, Tom?"

"I believe I did. But I am quite done up with talking to Miss Manners. Did you see how she nailed me, Polly?"

"I was very much amused. It would do you no harm to make yourself polite for once in a way."

"I shan't forget her in a hurry. 'Revenge! Tom-otheus cries,'" declaimed Tom, striking an attitude.

The Lawsons began to laugh, and Mary, seeing there was something in the wind, looked from one to the other for explanation.

"Tell Miss Elwood," said Henry.

"No, no. You keep a quiet tongue in your head. Now I have something to say to you boys; and Polly, you can wait till after tea to go to this place, can't you?"

"Will you go with me then?"

"Yes."

"Sure? Because I can't go by myself after dusk."

"Quite sure," said Tom, with a nod of dismissal.

Mary walked away rather piqued. She was not curious, she said to herself, but she thought Tom showed a want of confidence in her which was undeserved.

All was, however, soon forgotten over the pages of "Westward Ho!" and the tea bell rang before she had been able to tear herself away to collect the old linen that she meant to take with her in the evening.

Tea over, she wrote two or three letters, and then put on her things and went to look up Tom.

Mrs. Elwood, Alf and Gertie had gone to a drawing-room meeting at Mr. Spencer's—Mr. Spencer was now incumbent of a district church on the further side of Brentham.

Only Effie and Tom were in the dining-room, the latter leaning back on the sofa with one leg cocked up on a chair.

"Tom, can you come now? I am ready."

"No; I've not got over Miss Manners yet. I feel just like a sucked orange."

"I'm sorry for you; but do come now."

"I am too comfortable to move at present."

Mary stood for a few moments, and then said impatiently —

"Tom, I'm waiting."

"Wait then," said the imperturbable Tom, bringing up the other leg to join its fellow.

Mary looked as if she would have dearly loved to box his ears, but that could not be done without loss of dignity.

Tom lay blinking at her with half-closed eyes and a most provoking expression on his face.

"Do you mean to come or not, Tom?" asked Mary, angrily.

"Don't excite yourself. To-morrow will do quite as well," he replied, cheerfully.

"Then I shall go alone. I might have known what your promise was worth if it was to do anything obliging. I wouldn't for worlds —"

"Get out of the way, Effie. Miss Dynamite's going off."

Mary shot a lightning glance at him; then she turned on her heel to leave the room, while Effie called after her —

"Mary, you mustn't go alone at this time of night. He's only trying to plague you, stupid!"

The idea commended itself to Mary's judgment, but she did not care to entertain it, so she left the house and hurried along the road, fierce and resentful.

She had not gone far when she heard someone running behind her. It was a lonely road and she could not resist looking

round. It was Tom, so she turned away her head instantly and quickened her pace.

"That was a pretty severe handicap. I declare I am puffed," he said, as he came up to her. "I must train, or I shall get too stout for the sports."

Mary, still nursing her wrath, took no notice of him, and walked on briskly.

"Hold on a bit. How you do peg along."

"I prefer to go alone, thank you."

"And I prefer that you shouldn't."

"I don't want you, Tom; you had better go home."

"Go home, good dog, go home!" mimicked Tom.

Mary could not help herself; she burst into uncontrollable laughter.

"Tom," she protested, when she could speak, "I am really very angry. You had no right to treat me like that. I am not laughing."

"No, really, do you say so?" returned Tom, opening his wicked eyes to their fullest extent.

"Go along, Tom. I won't have you," said Mary, peremptorily, her voice unsteady with suppressed laughter.

"That is unfortunate," said Tom, seizing her hand and drawing her arm in his before she could make any resistance.

She tried to draw it away, but Tom held it tight, so, feeling thoroughly conquered, she subsided into submission, and walked on in silence.

They were now in sight of Kenhope, a hamlet on the banks of the Ken, a small tributary of the Brent.

The sun had set, but the sky was luminous and, in the east, still blue. Soon they reached the village church, which stood out in rugged, massive strength against the pale sky. A solitary swallow was wheeling her last flight before going in at the belfry window, where

she had found her an house, and a thrush broke the silence of the sombre woods with the clear, rich notes of his evening song.

"What a heavenly night!" exclaimed Mary.

"I am sorry I can't agree with you. I call—these midges—anything but heavenly," replied Tom, making savage dashes at his foes between the words.

"So very still," pursued Mary, speaking to herself, and looking along the receding line of trees to the distant hills. Minute feathery cirri, faintly pink, disposed themselves in bands across the clear sky. Wonderfully near they seemed, for the softening of outline on the horizon united earth and sky in one harmonious whole.

"I am glad you find it calming," remarked Tom. "Another time I wouldn't lose my temper about nothing."

Mary snatched her arm away from him as if she had been stung. She walked on beside

him, silently resentful, and Tom could only evoke monosyllables in reply to his remarks. This he found slow, and to beguile the tedium of the way, began to whistle "Grandfather's Clock!" He could not have hit upon a more effectual revenge. The vulgar sounds jarred upon Mary's sensitive ear and chafed spirit, and she found it almost more than she could bear. But the cottage was in sight.

"Don't be more than a hour. I shall wait outside," said Tom.

"I shan't be five minutes," she replied, and knocked at the door.

"Eh? Miss Elwood! And is it yourself? I is glad to see you. And such a stranger as ye are! Coom in, hinny. Will ye sit doon?" said the old woman, dusting a chair.

Mary took the offered seat, though she had only a few minutes to stay. She had no idea of keeping a woman standing in her own house, because she happened to be poor.

"And hoo are ye keeping, Miss Mary?

Ye look well aboot yer. And are ye by yerself?"

"No, my brother came with me."

"And he s waitin' outside, peeär thing! Let me fetch him in?"

"Certainly not, Mrs. Robson; I shouldn't think of your going out with that neck of yours. How is it?"

"It's soom better, but I's bad whiles. Eh, what a week I've pat in! It's time I got shot of it, but I doobt I've getten a mischeef of cold in it."

A long history of the sore place followed and to Mary's horror the old woman began to take off the bandages.

"You had better not disturb it," she said, anxiously.

"Hoots, hinny! no harm. I want ye to see it."

Mary was naturally squeamish and readily upset, but she made up her mind to the ordeal, and showed no sign of repugnance.

After sympathizing and advising care, she gave her little bundle of old linen and got up to say good-bye.

"I've never got your ma asked after, Miss Elwood," said the old woman, who had been charwoman at Elwood Grange for many years.

"She's very well, thank you."

"Peeär thing!" was the reply in a tone of the deepest commiseration. This expression had puzzled and amused Mary when she first heard it, but she now understood it as a term of endearment.

"*She's* a canny woman," continued the old body.

Every member of the family was next asked after, until Mary, suspecting the *ruse* to detain her, reminded Mrs. Robson of the "poor thing outside."

"Eh, then I'll not keep you, ma jewel; but divn't be long in cooming back."

Tom having had nothing else to do, had

spent the interval in reflection, and being a good-hearted fellow at the bottom, felt some stirrings of penitence for having provoked his sister.

They had not gone far before he held out the white flag.

"*Pax*, Polly, *repento*,—no, how is it the Dominie has it?—*exorciso te*. I am afraid my Latin is rusty, but you know what I mean."

"All right, *absolvo te*," said Mary, putting her arm in his. "But, old Tom, if you don't mind my giving you a wee lecture," she ventured. "I wish you would be just a little bit more careful of other people's feelings."

"Why do you have feelings? Put 'em in your pocket, as I do, and they'll never get hurt."

"I wish I could. Now to proceed: You are to imagine that other people's feelings are

running all about the place, like beetles—no, not 'clocks,' sir—not 'them beadles,' but nice garden gentlemen, and you must look where you go, or you will squash them."

"The very thing I should like to do."

"No, you wouldn't. You aren't cruel, and I don't believe you are such a bad boy at heart, Tom, though you do very often bring your foot down where you shouldn't."

"Much obliged," said Tom, vastly amused by his lecture. "Now, in return, I will tell you a secret. I mean to be even with Miss Manners. We think, too, that Brentham is going to sleep, and that a visitation from the other world would be an advantage."

"Tom, do you mean to say that you are going to get up a ghost?"

"Your penetration is remarkable."

"I don't believe it. I shouldn't mind your paying out Mother Grundy, though, interfering old thing! Did you hear about the cricket?"

"I saw her jawing you, and looking more

than ever like a—what's that fat bird again?"

"Puffin, do you mean?"

"That's it. And she doesn't approve of cricket? Well, Polly, you shall have your revenge; the thing's in train."

"Tom, you mustn't. And with those boys —Well, you are but a boy after all."

"Shut up, you chit!"

"I beg your pardon—it's too dark to see your whiskers. But what are you going to do?"

"Return Mother Grundy's call, that's all."

"Please don't, Tom. You might frighten them dreadfully; and suppose you were found out?"

"No fear, unless that ninny Walter bursts out laughing; but I've promised him a ducking in the mill stream if he does."

"I wish you would give it up," she urged.

"Polly, I didn't think you were such a marplot. And I know you'd give your eyes to see the fun."

"I wish you wouldn't do it. You might try and frighten us in the garden if you liked," said Mary sarcastically, "but I know you'll get into a scrape if you play practical jokes in the town. I think nothing of you, Tom."

"That's how you treat your champion!"

"But I forgive Mother Grundy. Please don't avenge me in that style."

"Then I'll promise to take a week or two to think over it."

"Tom, I think no end of you," said Mary, warmly, hoping this concession was tantamount to relinquishing the design. "I believe I'll give you a kiss," she added, mischievously.

"Thank you, I'll suppose it done," said Tom, who submitted morning and evening to the penance of having his "face flapped," but resisted gratuitous inflictions; "and your gratitude is premature. "Full moon is not the time for ghosts."

"But in a few weeks your whiskers may have grown. Besides, Julia Manners told me that young Forrest was coming into the office, and he is a sort of cousin of theirs, so they are sure to find you out if you play any tricks. I fancy I see you going with mamma to make an apology to Mrs. Swan; I should laugh."

"I fancy I see myself," replied Tom, dryly.

CHAPTER IV.

Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion ?

BRENTHAM, though but a small town, was not without intellectual advantages. During the colder half of the year lectures were given fortnightly upon historical or scientific subjects by different people living in the neighbourhood. It was very convenient to be able to study by proxy, and acquire the cream of a science or the history of an epoch in the course of an hour, and Brentham people, if they did not drink deep at the Pierian spring, at least enjoyed the opportunity of sipping often.

It had come to the last lecture of the

season, and Alf announced the subject as "Rome, Ancient and Modern," with photographs.

"Won't you come to-night, Tom?" asked Mrs. Elwood; "it will be very interesting, I think."

"I am afraid I am engaged to go to the Forrest's."

Mr. Forrest was the other partner in the bank, and his son, Sydney, had recently joined Tom in the office.

"We so seldom have the pleasure of your company now," complained Mrs. Elwood.

"I am sorry to deprive you of it," he replied. "I suppose there will be a good many there?"

"Yes, the Manners are going. There's an inducement, Tom!" urged Mary.

"'M. Then I certainly shouldn't go upon any consideration."

"It is very rude of you to say so when mamma asked you," remarked Effie.

"Your brother isn't serious," said Mrs. Elwood, who never allowed anyone to find fault with Tom.

Tom ignored both reproof and defence, and sat gazing steadily before him with his hands on his knees.

"I suppose you will drive back," he said presently.

"Yes, it might be damp."

The lecture was interesting enough, and at the close several gathered round the table for a closer view of the photographs, amongst them the Misses Manners.

"Oh, Miss Elwood, I thought I saw you. I felt sure you would be here. What a delightful lecture! One feels really as if one had lived in those times. And such exquisite views! And dear Mrs. Elwood is here, too. How do you do? I'm so sorry aunt couldn't come, she has a bad cold; and Julia has sprained her ankle, but I couldn't persuade her to stay at home. I am afraid she will

suffer for this; but we must put on a wet bandage to-night, and hope for the best. It would have been a pity for Julia to have missed this lecture, wouldn't it? And aunt, too; but —"

"Mamma," began Mary, tired of waiting for an opportunity, "I should like to walk home with Alf. Miss Julia can take my place."

"How very kind you are to think of it; but I am sure Julia would not like to turn you out."

"Mary would enjoy the walk, and there will be room for both of you," said Mrs. Elwood.

"Then we will go at once," Mary hastened to say before Miss Manners could begin again; and nodding a good-night to her, she signed to Alf and made for the door.

"What a magpie!" she exclaimed, as they reached the open air.

"Rather trying," assented Alf.

It was a fine night, almost dark, but a band of pale yellow light lingered above the western horizon. They were just able to distinguish the stile, and crossed into a path which led through a few fields, and came out by Mrs. Swan's garden.

"How did you like the lecture?" asked Mary, as they strolled along, arm-in-arm. "It wouldn't have been bad if it hadn't been so pretentious. I can't bear a lot of big words about nothing. Dr. Johnson wouldn't have been far wrong after all. It is generally the little fishes that talk like whales. Oh!"

Both started back, for out of the sky, as it seemed, dropped a great white figure just in front of them.

Mary was the first to recover herself, and to say indignantly to Alf—

"It's Tom! Do get hold of him!" rushing forward and seizing the sheet at the same time.

The ghost tried to free himself, and made

great leaps into the air, but Mary kept her hold until a burst of smothered laughter from the top of the wall and "Hold on, Polly," made her leave go as if the sheet had been red hot. The ghost cleared the wall at a bound, and the whole party disappeared.

"What a shame, Alf!" said Mary, laughing excitedly. "It wasn't Tom, after all."

"It was too bad."

"It was horrid! it was hateful! The ghost was almost too big for one of the Lawsons. Who could it have been?"

"I don't know, unless it was young Forrest. I am sorry, Mary. It startled me, too."

"I didn't mind that part of it. But I shall have something to say to you, Mr. Tom; making me feel so silly!"

"What did he do it for? He didn't expect us to walk home."

"No; don't you see? It was meant for his friend, Miss Manners."

They reached the house just after the carriage, and Tom followed shortly.

Mary avoided meeting his eye, but whispered to him as she said good-night —

"I shall have something to say to you to-morrow."

But Tom determined to be first in the field, and greeted her next morning with —

"What did you mean, Polly, by playing off your tricks on me?"

"What did you mean by making a silly of me?"

"How could I help it? But I forgive you for balking me of my revenge. It was worth everything to see you tugging at the sheet, and the ghost trying to get away;" and Tom went into a fit of laughter.

"Tom, you are abominable!" said Mary, who, nevertheless, could not but laugh too. "Who was it?"

"Would you like to know?" asked Tom with an impudent wink.

"Yes; I mean to know. I shall find out somehow; but I would rather you told me now."

"I'll bring him to dinner to-night."

"No, you won't, Tom. I shall go out for the evening if you do."

"Then we can come together to fetch you home. He's very harmless, Polly, and you must meet him. Besides, he was quite struck with your pluck."

"He will be struck with my disagreeableness to-night, then."

The evening brought Sydney Forrest, a young man about Tom's age, with dark hair and eyes, and a black moustache which seemed to have a strange attraction for his fingers.

He bowed to Mary with an ill-concealed smirk, which she resented, treating him stiffly, and placing Gertie between herself and him at table.

But when, in the course of the evening, the

attraction of tea drew the young men into the drawing-room, Sydney found an opportunity of saying —

"I am awfully sorry I frightened you last night, Miss Elwood. I assure you I was the most taken aback of the two. I hope you will forgive me?"

"I suppose I must."

"We had no idea you were walking. It was an awful sell for us. I am sure it was you that scored. Did you do it on purpose?"

"No; but I am glad it happened, on the whole. Don't you try any more ghost-scenes, or we shall tell tales," said Mary, thinking it a good opportunity of giving a warning.

"No, Miss Elwood; you never would?"

"I don't advise you to make the experiment," she said, as she sat down to sing.

Sydney was not quite satisfied that he had made his peace, and when she had finished her song he began again —

"I hope you don't think that I would knowingly have taken any part in playing a trick upon you, Miss Elwood?"

"I don't know why you shouldn't, if you would play one upon Miss Manners."

"Oh! but they are fair game. Louisa will talk your head off, and Julia's as bad; but she has a little spite about her, which makes her rather more interesting. Isn't that your opinion?"

Mary made some unintelligible answer.

"Ah! you don't like to say so."

"I thought they were connections of yours," she said.

"Connections? Yes, I suppose they are. But one does not think every goose a swan because she happens to be a cousin of some degree."

Mary's eyes gleamed mischievously, as he innocently claimed kinship with the goose tribe, but she contented herself with saying soberly —

"I see," which might mean anything.

Sydney took it as a snub, and in revenge turned to talk to Mrs. Elwood, a step which he immediately afterwards regretted, as Mary very contentedly placed herself on the sofa beside Tom, and sounds of lively badinage reached his ear. But it was too late. Mrs. Elwood found him a "nice young man," and he was obliged to do the polite to her for the rest of the evening, addressing himself occasionally to Effie, who sat near, and was perfectly ready to take her part in the conversation, though Sydney considered her quite beneath his notice as a little girl still in the schoolroom.

CHAPTER V.

Why, what's the matter,
That you have such a February face,
So full of frost, of storm, of cloudiness?

THE Easter vacation came to an end. Alf went to Trimblemere, a village in the wilds of Westmoreland, to spend a few days with his old schoolfellow, now his college friend, Maurice Hughes, before going back to Oxford. The daily governess returned to Elwood Grange, and took possession of Effie and Gertie during the whole morning—including a constitutional, in which Mary joined them—and again for two hours in the afternoon.

Mary was left a great deal to her own resources. Mrs. Elwood was a very busy woman, looking well to the ways of her household, and doing a good deal of outdoor work amongst the poor in Brentham. Unfortunately, she held strongly to Miles Standish's favourite adage, "Serve yourself, would you be well served," and the only duty which she entrusted to Mary was the arrangement of cut flowers; even that she could not leave to her without frequently giving advice and suggesting alterations. Mrs. Elwood was one of those people who seem to think it their mission to set the world in order, and are more ready to find fault than to admire excellence. Without intending to do so, she had the art of rubbing people the wrong way and notifying her wishes in a manner calculated to rouse opposition.

She was anxious that her step-daughters should be patterns of perfection, and was constantly issuing orders or correcting faults.

Effiie listened or obeyed with a secret sneer or contemptuous aside; but Mary, though she often kicked against her step-mother's authority, was too loyal to indemnify herself after Effie's fashion, and sometimes flared up and sometimes yielded an ungracious obedience.

And so, with no congenial companions, and with next to nothing to do beyond self-imposed tasks, our poor Mary had little resistance to offer to that miserable spirit—the Germans call him *Weld-schmerz*—who goes about seeking unoccupied corners into which he may creep.

A letter written to Alf a few weeks after he had left gives some idea of her home life. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAREST ALF,

"What a long, long time it seems since you went away! What shall I do to make midsummer come quicker? You asked how I was getting on at home, so I shall make

a father-confessor of you, and you may prepare for an *égoiste* letter, as there is really no news to tell you.

"To begin with, I must confess that it is rather dull—and do you wonder, Alf? The girls are at lessons most of the day, and mamma busy, and there is nothing I *must* do. I had a fit of painting after you left, and then a fit of practising, and after that a fit of reading hard, but now I havn't a fit of anything, and you don't know how horrid it is to feel as there was nothing you cared to do, and never would be any more.

"Yesterday mamma asked me to go shopping with her, but that was no great treat, for I do dislike wasting a whole morning over choosing a yard of ribbon or ordering a leg of mutton. Mamma's progress through Brentham reminds me of those little black waterhens—nod, nod all the way. Every dozen yards she stops to speak to somebody, and one says, 'What dull weather it is,' and

another, 'How changeable,' and the next, 'How unseasonable,' which, you will agree, is very lively and interesting.

"Tom hardly ever spends an evening with us. I don't know that he cares much for young Forrest, but they are always together, fishing or playing billiards. We thought of putting up the tennis net last week, but the ground is so soppy that I don't know when it will be fit to use. I may tell you that it has rained every day for the last fortnight—I quite wish I was a turnip.

"What a growl this letter is. I am half inclined to burn it, but perhaps if I did you might not get one at all. Things are not altogether so bad. We have been out several times, and I generally manage to enjoy myself. The other day we had tea at the Spencer's, and I had a little bit of Mr. Spencer all to myself. We talked about papa, and he asked what I was reading, and told me to try 'Butler's Analogy.' I did enjoy talking

to him, only that there were a thousand and one things I wanted to ask him but dared not venture.

"I hear the girls leaving the schoolroom, and it pours, so we shall have a game of battledore and shuttlecock in the hall instead of a walk. After which I dare say I should write a more cheerful letter, so don't bother your dear old head about

"Your very loving sister,

"MARY.

"P.S.—We have begun to read poetry aloud in the evening. We choose in turn. It is a capital idea."

Mary's prophecy was fulfilled; she did feel much more cheerful after her game, and set to work in the afternoon with real zest upon a chess problem in the "Illustrated."

She was alone in the dining-room, and had been at work some time, when Mrs. Elwood put in her head and complained in a tone of annoyance —

"There you are again, Mary! You always let the fire out."

"All right, mamma, I'll see to it. Please don't speak to me this moment," entreated Mary, who thought she saw a clue.

"All right, indeed! But it isn't all right! You never think what trouble you give to the servants," returned Mrs. Elwood, sharply; and she left the room.

"There, you've spoilt it all!" cried Mary, as the door closed, dashing the men off the board. "And that's always the way. If I do a thing once, you say I *always* do it."

She got up and poked the fire vigorously, but it was too late. So she rang the bell, and then began to look for her scattered chessmen, sighing to herself, "Oh, dear, what a baby I am!"

"What will you do to me, Elizabeth?" she said, when the maid appeared, "I have let the fire out. I am so sorry."

"It doesn't matter, miss; I'll soon light

it again," replied Elizabeth, cheerfully. Mary was habitually courteous to the servants, and was a great favourite.

She set to work again upon her problem, and had just solved it, when Mrs. Elwood, having forgotten the little disagreement, came in to warm herself at the cheerful fire, and enjoy a cup of tea.

"I wish you had been out with me, dear. I found I had half an hour to spare, so I called on the Forrest's. Miss Forrest seems a pleasant girl, with plenty to say for herself. I hope she may be an acquisition."

"Is she going to live at home now?"

"Yes, I think the aunt will go away, and Amelia will keep house for her father, now that poor Mrs. Forrest is dead."

"How old is she, mamma?"

"Nearer thirty than twenty, I should think; but you like friends older than yourself. I have asked her to come to afternoon tea to-morrow."

The possibility of finding a congenial friend kept Mary's thoughts agreeably occupied until it was time to dress for dinner.

"Is that you, Tom?" she called, catching sight of a tall figure in the hall divesting itself of a dripping mackintosh. "Are you going to stay at home to-night?"

"What do you suppose I am to do with myself, young woman, if I do stay at home?" he said, taking hold of her by the shoulders. "Listen to you play a toon?"

"No. Have a game of chess with me, and make yourself generally amiable. Effie has something to read to us, too."

"To which I am also to listen. Very well; I dare say I can do both those things at once."

"Rude boy!" said Mary, pretending to box his ears. "Do you know that I have done a chess problem this afternoon?"

"No. I should like to see it."

"You shall take black this evening. You *are* going to be at home, aren't you?"

"I am not going anywhere."

"Are you tired of Sydney Forrest at last?"

"No, he's well enough. But his sister has come home, and I shan't go there so often. I have no mind to let myself in for another Miss Manners."

"Mamma has been to call, and says that she has plenty to say for herself."

"Where was there a woman that hadn't? But I shan't lay myself out to be bored unnecessarily."

"Tom," protested Mary, in solemn tones, fixing her eyes upon him, "I do trust that you are not one of those men—the most odious creatures on earth—who fancy everyone is going to fall in love with them. If so, you never were more mistaken."

Tom's face relaxed into a droll smile.

"It would be a very natural mistake, when I find myself so generally acceptable. See

how eager you all are for the pleasure of my company."

"It is only because we can get nobody better, so you needn't be conceited. We would much rather have Alf."

"Alf enjoys doing the polite, I believe. But without any nonsense, Polly, I confess to you frankly that I can't stand women—they do bore so. For your satisfaction I may tell you that you are one of the most tolerable specimens I know when you are in a good temper."

"I think the insult of your speech outweighs the compliment," replied Mary, who felt flattered nevertheless. "But you'll change your mind some day, my dear. We don't expect much from boys." And she beat a timely retreat.

The evening passed quickly. Tom was in the best of humours. Mary demonstrated the correctness of her solution, and received a pat on the back. A game followed, and, Tom's attention being divided between his

play and his nonsense, she contrived to catch him tripping, and triumphantly prepared the way for a checkmate.

"It's very unsociable of you to play chess all the evening," complained Effie.

"Tom enjoys a game, my dear," said Mrs. Elwood, reprovingly.

"It wasn't Tom that suggested it," pursued Effie, in the same tone.

Mary was not inclined to quarrel.

"We've just done," she said. "You can find your place, and we shall be ready to listen."

"I don't quite know what to choose. I have got the 'Ancient Mariner'"—

"Oh, not that!" begged Mary.

"Why not?"

"Please read the other. I am sure it is something very nice," said her sister, hoping to conciliate; and she added in an aside to Tom, "That 'Ancient Mariner' is such a creepy thing."

"Have you got the 'Fakenham Ghost' for the other, Effie?" asked Tom.

"Don't tease, there's a good boy!" said Mary, while Effie answered, "No," and persisted—"Why shouldn't I read the 'Ancient Mariner'?"

"Oh! do as you please," replied Mary, coldly, adding in an undertone, "I shan't feel obliged to listen."

"What is the other, Effie?" asked Mrs. Elwood.

"'Beth Gelert,' mamma."

"Can't you read that? We don't want any words about it."

"Yes, if Mary would give the reason why she objects to the other. She always reads what she likes on her nights."

"I am not going to give any reasons. I told you you could do as you liked."

"Of course I can," returned Effie. "I don't need your permission."

"Just stop that, will you?" said Tom,

impatiently. "Why can't you punch each other's heads and have done with it, instead of this nag, nag, nag, for all the world like the jackdaws in my chimney?"

"Yes, indeed, it is a pity you two sisters can't live together without quarrelling. You forget how unpleasant it is for other people," chimed in Mrs. Elwood.

"I wasn't quarrelling," muttered Mary, angrily, gathering her things together and preparing to leave the room.

Tom caught her by the wrist.

"Look here, Effie; make up your mind. If you are going to read 'Beth Gelert,' we'll stay and listen; if you prefer the other, Polly and I will go into the dining-room and have another game."

"I can read 'Beth Gelert,'" said Effie, sulkily. "I didn't know you wanted it."

"Then you know now. Sit down, Polly."

"No, Tom; let me go. I would rather"—

"I shan't. Sit down at once. Is all this

by way of tempting me to spend the evenings at home?"

Mary felt the force of the reproach, and obeyed quietly.

After family prayers, Effie, who had not recovered from her sulks, contrived to slip away without saying good-night to Mary.

These bickerings were so frequent that the continual dropping had considerably worn away the sisterly affection on both sides. But Mary could not bear to feel that anyone cherished a grudge against her, and the thought that her own sister should go away without saying good-night, and should lie down "hating her," as she phrased it, was dreadful. So she went upstairs, and, after hanging about her sister's door for some time, made a pretext to go in and speak to Gertie. Effie took no notice of her, and she was afraid she would gain nothing by her move. But her desire to make it up with her sister overcame her pride, and, after

kissing Gertie, she stood for a moment and said, with some effort —

"Good-night, Effie."

There was no response, and, full of bitterness, Mary went to her room, got into bed, and cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER VI.

In my soul I loathe all affectation.

MARY had forgotten her troubles when she came down next morning, but they were speedily recalled to her mind; for as soon as the others had gone to the schoolroom, with the ominous preface, "Will you shut the door?" Mrs. Elwood sat down, and pointed Mary to a chair near her.

The girl knew what was coming. Mrs. Elwood had a peculiar set tone in which she delivered her lectures. It was meant as an assertion of authority, but was unfortunate in its effect. Mary at once felt like a prisoner addressed from the bench, and her

one thought was to pass through the ordeal as quickly as possible. When younger, she had been used to defend herself stoutly against all charges, but experience had taught her that this course prolonged the trial, which was always of some duration, for Mrs. Elwood was decidedly long-winded; so now she usually maintained a rigid silence.

Mrs. Elwood began —

"I want you, my dear, to cultivate a more pleasant manner towards your sisters."

"Sisters! What have I said to Gertie?" burst out Mary.

"Sister, then," answered Mrs. Elwood with dignity. "But that is not the tone in which to speak to me."

Mary made no reply, and Mrs. Elwood proceeded with what she had to say.

Mary, inwardly chafing, sat it out in dogged silence; and, when at last Mrs. Elwood came to a pause, asked —

"Is that all, mamma?"

"Yes, for the present. Now try to bear in mind what I have been saying; it is said for your own good. It is no pleasure to me to have to find fault with you."

"I wonder you do it so often, then," said Mary to herself, as she rose to leave the room. "Everybody is against me," she cried, in a passionate whisper, as she ran upstairs. As she took the precaution of locking her door, we may gather that the outpouring of her angry feelings, as she paced up and down, was not meant to go beyond the walls of her room. Finding that she could not work off her temper in that way, she sat down and wrote an account of her wrongs and her miseries to Alf. This so relieved her mind, that when, after sitting for some time gazing out of the window, she took up her letter and re-read it, she found that things had somewhat altered their complexion. By degrees she calmed down, and occupied herself until lunch, keeping out of Mrs. Elwood's way.

But Mrs. Elwood, having delivered herself, had dismissed the subject from her mind, quite unconscious of the storm she had raised; and it was in her usual manner that she said to Mary at lunch—

"You won't forget Miss Forrest, dear? I asked her on purpose that you and she might become acquainted."

"Thank you very much, mamma. I will be at hand."

"Can I come down?" asked Effie.

"I daresay, dear, if you like. Ask Miss Morell to excuse you both, if you have not quite finished lessons."

"I don't see why we shouldn't go in to see Miss Forrest as much as Mary," said Effie to Gertie, as they waited in the schoolroom for the governess. "She is only a year older than I am, and we shouldn't be treated as if we were children, and she as if she was quite grown up."

This year's difference in age was a sore

point with Effie, and she felt it hard to be kept in the background, the more so that the glass told her she was rather pretty.

Effie was fair, with light-coloured eyes, and almost flaxen hair, cut and frizzed over her forehead. Her features were small, her figure trim, and she had pretty manners when she chose to make herself pleasant. But she felt herself thrown into the shade by Mary's greater beauty and superior intellect, and showed her jealousy by petty, provoking speeches, which caused alienation between the sisters.

Gertie, Effie's inseparable companion, was a little, plump, comfortable, "sonsy" body—no genius, but useful and sensible, always ready to run errands, or do any little odd job that no one else would undertake.

Gertie looked up to and admired both her sisters, but she shared Effie's room, and worked with her in lesson-hours, and it had become a habit with her to consult Effie in

everything. She had no wish to cut herself off from Mary, but Effie found pleasure in keeping Gertie in attendance upon herself, and leaving her elder sister out in the cold.

So, as Tom was out all day and Alf was away, Mary felt very much the want of a friend and companion, and looked forward with anxious interest to seeing Miss Forrest.

The afternoon being wet, she stayed indoors, and thought it a good opportunity of acting on Mr. Spencer's advice, and beginning "Butler's Analogy." She took it up with the more zest because she had heard doubts expressed as to whether she was capable of understanding it. Had it been simple and easy, it is questionable whether she would have found incitement enough to take the trouble of reading it through; but, as it was, she enjoyed her lesson in logic, and was quite sorry to close the book when Miss Forrest was announced.

Miss Forrest was a plain edition of her

brother, but she had the attraction of a lively, self-possessed manner, and made herself at home with the girls at once.

"It was so kind of Mrs. Elwood to call so soon," she began. "I am very glad to make your acquaintance, for I have been so much from home that I hardly know any Brentham people. I had not seen Mr. Spencer since his marriage until they called yesterday. What an odd little person his wife is! But I daresay she may be pleasant enough."

"She is particularly pleasant," said Mary, who was very fond of Mrs. Spencer. "You have been abroad a great deal, Miss Forrest?"

"Yes; dear mamma could stand the summer in the south of England, but we were obliged to go away before the weather broke up. We spent last winter at Cannes. It is a charming place, and one meets such nice people there. We fell in with an artist—a Mr. Barritt. I dare say you have heard of

him. I am generally afraid of very clever people, but he was particularly kind, and so encouraging about my sketching efforts."

"I think one would always rather show one's work to a first-rate man than to a middling one, if one could muster courage to trouble him with it," said Mary.

"I always think they will see so many faults," answered Miss Forrest, affectedly.

"That's just what I should feel," put in Effie.

"Please don't think that I mean my things are good," said Mary, with difficulty restraining her impatience. "Of course they would see ever so many faults, but I shouldn't care about that, if they would make me see them too; and I should feel that they knew what I was aiming at, and I believe they would be the kindest critics, even if they were the most severe."

An awkward silence followed, which Miss Forrest broke by observing —

"I ought to agree with you, for certainly Mr. Barritt was most encouraging, and he is quite a first-rate man. He has several things in the Academy this year. Do you do much work, Miss Elwood?" she asked, by way of changing the subject.

"Not a great deal. I have knitted a pair of socks and worked a sofa-cushion lately."

"Ah, but that was only a splash in the pan," said Effie, who was considered the worker of the family.

"I don't do much, I own," replied Mary, repressing a smile. "Bring your antimacassar, Effie."

"I shall be so glad to show you some new patterns that I ordered the other day," said Miss Forrest, after admiring Effie's work. "There are several chair-backs amongst them. I find I have to send to London for everything," she continued, turning to Mary; "there is no choice in Brentham. If one wants a few yards of ribbon, one can get it

by return of post from Marshal and Snelgrove. I suppose you do the same?"

"I like to get whatever I can in Brentham, for the sake of the tradespeople."

"I don't. They always fancy they know better what you want than you do yourself, and look so sour if you don't take what they offer you. I can't bear that sort of thing."

"Oh, have you found it so?" replied Mary. "We think them very obliging."

"I am afraid I am not so self-denying as to make a martyr of myself for the sake of the Brentham shopkeepers," said Miss Forrest, turning to Effie with an affected little laugh.

"I don't see why you should," replied Effie, smiling back.

Tea broke the thread of the conversation, and shortly after Miss Forrest went away, pressing the girls to take pity on her solitude, and giving a special invitation to Effie to come and see her patterns of work.

"How do you like your new friend?" asked Tom, as he put in an appearance before dinner.

"Very much," said Effie; "she is very nice indeed."

"And you, Polly?"

"One opinion is enough at a time, sir," replied Mary; and Tom gave a comprehending grunt.

He took another opportunity of eliciting Mary's opinion.

"Is she like Miss Manners, Polly?"

"No; she's not so silly, but she's more provoking. I don't know how I shall get on with her if we are thrown much together."

"Make her over to Effie."

"Yes, I will. But I am disappointed. I wish she had been nice."

"So do I, for your sake. I don't think Sydney is very devoted to her."

"I don't like him the better for that."

"Poor Forrest! I am afraid his chances

are small in a certain quarter," said Tom, looking at her out of the corners of his eyes.

"Silly!" ejaculated Mary.

"I know he would like to come here more often than I bring him. I suppose it is to see Effie."

"I suppose it is," said Mary. "Go and make yourself tidy for dinner, sir."

CHAPTER VII.

> We bring forth weeds,
> When our quick minds lie still.

HOW to while away Sunday afternoon was a problem that often exercised the minds of the Elwoods. On the present occasion it had been a rainy morning, but a gleam of sunshine had tempted Mary out of doors. The garden had a special charm for her on Sunday. The spirit of the day seemed to communicate itself to the still life outside, and the little starlings that trotted about the lawn, trusting to an immunity from disturbance, did not detract from the feeling of the scene.

But St. Swithun had looked on the earth with a smile on his lips, but a tear in his eye; and a sharp shower soon drove her indoors.

Only Tom and her sisters were in the drawing-room. The girls were reading, and Tom's eyes were roving round the room in search of something to amuse himself with.

"Hullo! what's this?" he said, opening the first book within reach. "One blood, two frogs, three lice, four flies! Effie, where do you keep this collection of abominations?"

"What *are* you talking about?" exclaimed Gertie, horrified.

"Oh, Tom!" cried Effie, jumping up. "He's got hold of my Bible. Mary, do tell him to put it down."

"They had no such plague as 'one Tom' in Egypt, had they, Effie?"

"I am sure they hadn't. Tom, you'll lose something out of it."

"You should not make a flower-press of your Bible. Look here," said Tom, as a

shower of pelargonium petals fell on the floor.

"I wish you'd give it me," said Effie, crossly.

Tom handed her the book, leaving her to pick up the scattered treasures, grumbling as she did so.

"You must blame Sunday, not me," he said, consolingly. "Remember the rhyme about idle hands. This sort of thing don't suit me. I would rather be at the bank. I believe it would be better, too, only there would be such a kick-up."

"You wouldn't find it answer," said Mary. "Don't you know, scientific men say we need a day of rest?"

"I don't care a button-top what they say—unless it be Sir John Lubbock. Those Banking Acts of his are worth the whole lot of their rubbish to prove that we are descended from apes and that the sun's going out."

"You heathen! But I gather that you do

believe in Bank-holidays!" observed Mary, mischievously.

"That's another matter. I know what to do with myself on a Bank-holiday; but on Sunday I don't—except go to sleep;" and he drew up his legs on the sofa.

Alf came in from the Sunday-school, just as Tom had composed himself for a nap, and sat down near Mary with his book.

The party read in silence, until Tom awoke from his siesta.

"I never am so 'dowley' as on Sunday afternoon!" he exclaimed, yawning and stretching himself. "Is there anything to read to keep a fellow awake?"

"Here are sermons," suggested naughty Mary.

"Much obliged. Anything else?"

"Erasmus on 'Folly' might suit you better."

"I believe I stumbled upon it the other day—a little brown book, with old wood-cuts.

The title was 'Erasmi Rot,' which I take to mean some rot of Erasmus. Is that 'Mark Twain?' He'll do."

"You shouldn't read that on Sunday," said Effie. "You know mamma wouldn't like it, though I don't suppose you care about that."

"I know Effie is very particular what she reads on Sunday," replied Tom. "She found a very exciting, yellow-backed production upstairs some time ago, but she wouldn't have read it for the world, only that, as good luck would have it, she happened to open upon 'Good Heavens!'—clear proof that it was suitable and profitable. Why, what was it she had the other Sunday?—'American Notes,' I do believe."

"Well, I thought they were missionary travels," protested Effie.

Tom went into a roar of laughter.

"You're very rude, Tom. And I am sure it was stupid enough—I didn't read much of it."

This set Tom off again, until he laughed himself red in the face. Mary could not help catching the infection, but Effie preserved a dignified silence.

Alf had been reading, or rather trying to read, and taking no part in the conversation. His face gathered a more and more troubled expression, and he pressed his hand to his forehead.

Mary noticed the movement.

"However we think fit to spend Sunday, Tom," she said, as she gave him "Mark Twain," "we should remember that we owe something to other people's feelings and opinions."

Tom glanced at his brother.

"I can't say that you people help to make Sunday afternoon the most cheerful of times. I suppose there's no objection to my taking a walk?" he added curtly, rising from the sofa.

"It's the very best thing you can do,"

replied Mary. "Never mind him, Alf," she said, consolingly, when Tom had left the room, seeing that Alf looked more distressed than ever. "He's cross after his sleep; he'll be all right when he comes in."

"I am sorry if we have made Sunday dull to him. Perhaps it was selfish of me to go on reading."

"No, no, it's all right. Don't bother your dear old head. I am afraid we are a sad trouble to you, Alf," she said, drawing her chair close beside him and leaning her hand on his shoulder.

Alf did not answer. He passed his arm round her waist.

"I wish you weren't *quite* so good, Alf," she said presently.

"Oh, Mary, how can you say such things?"

"I didn't mean to vex you; but, oh! Alf, I sometimes feel so afraid that you will be wanted 'aloft,' and then what should I do?"

"Silly child," said Alf, smiling and kissing

her forehead, "perhaps you may be there first."

Mary shook her head, and they turned to their books.

Effie had always a desire to hear what was not intended for her ears, and, though she could not catch the latter part of the conversation, which was spoken in lower tones, she conjectured that it was upon Sunday-reading, and was wondering whether it concerned her. Presently she inquired, acidly —

"What book have *you* got, Mary?"

"'The Christian Year.' Why?"

"I only wanted to know. Do you never read a story on Sunday now?"

"No," replied Mary, "I never read them at all."

"Why not?" asked Effie, surprised. "You used to be always at it."

"Because I thought I would give it up."

"That's not much answer."

"Isn't it? I am sorry," said Mary; and

she began to read again, not caring to explain her reasons.

This was how it had come about. From a child Mary had suffered agonies from a nervous dread of being alone in the dark. Even in the day-time there were parts of the garden, and one or two rooms and long passages in the house, where she was liable to be panic-stricken, and which she generally avoided as "uncanny." But at night her fears increased tenfold, and she spent many an hour with her head under the clothes, haunted by such waking nightmares as going through the house and finding everybody dead, or discovering that human kind had disappeared from the face of the earth and left her alone like Campbell's Last Man.

As she grew older she found, to her shame and distress, that she did not shake off her nervousness. At school, where she shared a bedroom with others, she forgot all about it, and a thrilling ghost-story or the idea of

housebreakers was a pleasurable excitement, but in the holidays she slept alone, and the old trouble returned. Many a time she sacrificed her beauty-sleep in honour of the spirit who sits on cane-bottomed chairs, and makes furniture creak and loosens the mortar in the chimney.

It was not only in the dark that she suffered in this way. Occasionally it happened that she was left alone in the house for the evening, and sometimes, as she sat by herself in the large drawing-room, a horror came over her. The very emptiness seemed awful all round her, and the least noise or appearance for which she could not assign a cause showed that something evil was astir. She seemed possessed by a sort of feticism, and would stare at a creaking chair as if she expected to see the malignant spirit take visible form.

She had once ventured to speak of her fears, but having been met with an amused smile and "Why, my dear child, what do you

suppose there is to hurt you?" and having answered "Nothing," the subject was dropped, and Mary saw that it was impossible to explain the nature of her apprehensions; and not caring to expose herself to ridicule, kept her own counsel in future.

But later, during one of the holidays, when something had elicited a half-confession, Mrs. Elwood showed a truer appreciation of the case, and had remarked —

"I don't wonder that your head is full of fancies, when you read stories from morning till night."

This view of the case was new to Mary, and she felt that there was some force in it. But how could she give up that delightful story-land where she could always retreat when the world of actual life was uncongenial or unkind? Her reading had been by no means of a sensational character. I dare say the Waverleys might be taken as representative of the novels, and for the rest, children's

and religious stories, and whatever tales or scraps of tales she could lay hands upon in magazines. Indeed, there were very few sensational novels in the house, and Mary did not regret their absence, for she felt more at home in fairy-land than in the world of schemes and plots.

The more she pondered over it, the more convinced she became that her nervousness did increase in proportion to her story-reading. But this delight could only be relinquished as a last resort, and it was not until she had made many valiant, but unsuccessful efforts to overcome her enemy that she began reluctantly to face the alternative.

At last the crisis came. One night, when she had just put down her gas, leaving a point still burning, she heard an unearthly scream, ending in a shudder. She turned up the light and stood motionless a minute, while a whole "chamber of horrors" rose before her mind. It was repeated, and this

time she felt sure that it was no human voice, but probably a bird's. She opened the window and listened. It was clearly a stray owl from Barnley Woods. Mary put down the light and got into bed; but she lay listening for the sound, while a sympathetic shudder ran through her each time she heard it. She did not dare to sleep lest she should be wakened by some horrible nightmare. Her head ached, and she sat up and pressed her hands to her throbbing temples.

"What a wretched tyranny this is!" she thought. "Whatever it costs me, I will be free from it;" and there and then she resolved to try the experiment of total abstinence from works of fiction.

But it was no use fighting that night; she knew she would get no sleep until the small hours if she stayed where she was, so she got up and went into her sisters' room.

Effie was away, and Gertie was the soundest of sleepers, so Mary lay down

unheard. She could still hear the owl, but she did not mind it then. Why the presence of sleeping Gertie should make any difference she could not tell, but the fact remained, and in a very short time she was fast asleep.

Great was Gertie's amazement in the morning to see her there, and she could hardly wait until Mary was awake for an explanation. It was soon given.

"There was a wretched owl screeching under my window and I couldn't sleep, so I came in here. Don't say anything about it, there's a dear. It won't happen again."

Nor did it, for Mary adhered to her resolution, and found the experiment in great measure successful. It brought other advantages, for in the place of her stories she took to good hard reading—Butler, Berkeley, and other scientific and philosophical writers. If the book were beyond her, so much the better, she thought, for stretching her mind, and, since the days when she jumped the

stream, she had never cared to do anything easy. With the expanding of her intellectual grasp came a keen enjoyment of study, until it became almost as absorbing a pursuit as the one she had given up.

Best of all, with the development of her mental power, her judgment began to assert itself in opposition to her morbid fancies, and common-sense swept away many a cobweb from the king's palace.

* * * * *

Tom returned from his stroll, as Mary had prophesied, in a better humour.

"Was it fairly pleasant out?" she asked.

"Yes—I'm not made of sugar. I looked up Forrest. He's expecting a friend next week from Belchester, of the name of Sims; and, if I am right in thinking that an old cove that I travelled with some time ago was Papa Sims, I can tell you he was a howling cad."

"The son may be gentlemanly," suggested Mary.

"Possible," acquiesced Tom, "but I expect he'll be awfully common. I know the Simses think no small-beer of themselves."

"The Forrest's wouldn't have him unless he were a gentleman," chimed in Effie.

"I don't think much of Forrest's taste."

"He has a fancy for you, hasn't he?" observed Mary.

"I don't know. I think he likes another member of my family better."

Effie looked up inquisitively, and Mary turned a cross face to her brother. That kind of joking, though she considered it bad form, not to say vulgar, she could put up with when they were alone, but she declined being made its subject in the presence of a third party.

Tom understood both his sisters, and, turning to Effie, remarked carelessly —

"It's wonderful what a favourite he is with 'dear Mrs. Elwood,' as Amelia calls her."

"Did you see Amelia?" asked Effie,

"No, the sweet creature has got a cold."

"You're very rude, Tom."

Effie's friendship with Miss Forrest had made great strides, but Mary still found her an impossible person, and her visits were no more frequent than politeness required. Mary liked Sydney better. But though he was not nearly so provoking as his sister, she thought him shallow and conceited, and considered it quite possible to see too much of him, which afterwards, to her cost, proved to be the case.

CHAPTER VIII.

An ass-head, and a coxcomb, and a knave; a thin-faced knave, a gull!

"How late you were last night, Tom! Where were you?" asked Mrs. Elwood one morning.

"At Forrest's. We meant to play tennis, but the rain frightened us into the billiard-room."

"Who was there?"

"Walter Lawson and this friend of Forrest's."

"What is he like?" asked Effie.

"Like? A two-penny-half-penny sort of chap, and as conceited a little cock as I ever

set eyes on. He thought he was going to give me a regular pounding."

"I hope you won," said Mary.

"Walked over him as easily as possible. But it was all my fluking. There's a great deal of cha-a-ance in billiards" drawled Tom, with an affected smile. "I wonder he did not bring an action against me for bribing his ball. However, you can judge for yourselves to-morrow, for he is coming to supper."

"Oh, Tom, how could you?"

"Do you mean it?"

"I couldn't help myself. They are going to fish with us."

"That is Saturday. Very well. Then you must be punctual. I trust to you, Alf," said Mrs. Elwood, for Tom, though punctual at other times, was most uncertain in his return from fishing expeditions.

On the evening in question, however, the party arrived in good time at Elwood Grange.

Mary wondered, when she saw Mr. Sims,

what there was in him to have awakened her brother's dislike. He was one of those individuals who strike one as being on a reduced scale—a small, fair-haired man, with regular features and a good set of teeth, which he displayed by a frequent smile.

"What success have you had, Mr. Sydney?" asked Mrs. Elwood.

"I landed a twenty-pound after his nearly landing me in the water."

"Watering you, I suppose you mean," corrected Tom.

"A truce to your quibbles, Elwood. One would think you had been brought up to the law."

"You must be very accurate in the language you use in the hearing of such a critic as Tom," said Mary, "or he will be sure to catch you tripping."

Tom, as usual, gave no sign that he heard her. It was always the same, whether she poked a little fun at him or hurled bitter and

stinging speeches in her rages, maddened by her inability to produce any impression on her cool and self-possessed tormentor.

"He's a downy customer, is Tom," returned Sydney, with a shake of the head.

While this was passing, Mrs. Elwood had repeated her question to Mr. Sims.

"I was unfortunate," was the reply. "One gets one's hand out, living in a town; one has so few opportunities."

"The duffer wouldn't keep to one place," said Tom to Mary, *sotto voce.* "He was an awful nuisance. I'll pitch him into the water before I fish with him again."

Supper was announced. Mr. Sims was very attentive to the ladies—too fussily polite for good breeding; but he seemed bent on making himself agreeable, and Effie was delighted to have a neighbour so anxious to "assist" her to everything on the table.

"Well, I hope you admire Sims," said Tom, when the young men had gone.

"I think he is very harmless," replied Mary.

"I don't see why you dislike him," chimed in Effie.

"No, your brother expresses himself too strongly. You must guard against the habit, my dear Tom, or it will grow upon you," said Mrs. Elwood.

Tom inclined his head with an air of profound attention, laughing in his sleeve the while.

> "Remember where the judgment's weak
> The prejudice is strong,"

sang Mary saucily.

"I hope he will improve upon acquaintance," said Tom, with a twitch of his mouth. "He has one great recommendation; he is a thorough ladies' man."

"You old hypocrite," said Mary. "You know well enough that a ladies' man is the last person that ladies admire."

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"That may account for the fact of their all admiring me."

In spite of his aversion to Mr. Sims, a few days later Tom accepted for himself and his sister an invitation to go to tennis at the Forrest's.

Mary was ready in good time, and settled herself down to read while she waited for the others. Presently Effie looked in.

"*We* are going, Mary."

"We, always we," said Mary to herself, but she did not answer, so Effie went off.

Some time after Tom put in his head.

"Why Polly, it was the merest chance I looked in. Why didn't you go with the girls?"

"They didn't seem to want me."

"What rot! I had to get into my flannels, and I said you weren't to wait."

Mary felt rather ashamed of herself, so set off without a word, and they walked along briskly until they came in sight of a pant.

A word about pants, by the way, as the

northern term has not been admitted into Webster's Dictionary.

A pant is the counterpart of a village pump, an imposing stone erection with iron spout and handle, supplied with water from the reservoir. In front is a stone trough, sometimes two, for the convenience of horses and dogs.

In old days a picturesque construction of monumental form, with a ball at the top—Great Panjandrum-wise—had been the most characteristic feature of Brentham market-place. But one night was a deed of darkness done, and in the morning the inhabitants awoke to find that the familiar object had vanished.

The pant on the way to Elwood Grange was one of very few that had been spared by the ruthless reformers who ruled the roost in Brentham.

On the present occasion their clemency was ill repaid; it was being put to a bad use.

Beside it was a ragged urchin, tugging at a miserable draggled puppy with a stone tied to its neck.

Mary checked her speed for a moment to watch, then ran on and asked what the boy was doing.

For answer he kicked the pup, and the poor creature whined and cowered down at Mary's feet.

"Let it alone. You've no right to treat it in that way."

"It's none o' yourn," said the boy, trying to kick it again.

Tom had come up, and was looking on grim and silent. Mary placed herself between the puppy and its tormentor, and turned an appealing face to her brother.

When Tom did act, his measures were effective.

"That's your game, you little beggar," he said, as the boy pushed roughly past Mary's outstretched arm, and, taking him by the

collar, he jerked him towards the trough and popped his head under water. Then he set him on his feet again.

The boy howled, sputtered, and struggled, but Tom held him at arm's length.

"You'd like it again, would you?"

"No, please, Tom!" begged Mary; "he's had enough. Now listen to me," she said to the boy.

"Do you hear? Be quiet!" said Tom, imperatively.

"Is this your dog?" asked Mary.

The boy nodded.

"Then I will give you a shilling for him. Will you take it?"

He sulkily held out his hand for the money.

"Now be off," said Tom, and the lad, released, took to his heels and was soon out of sight.

"Next comes the question what we are to do with the little creature," observed Mary.

"That's your concern, not mine," replied Tom, coolly.

"I must take it back to the house, until we can find a home for it."

Mrs. Elwood would not allow pets, being under an impression that they always came to a sad end.

"It wouldn't be such a bad little beast if it was properly kept," said Tom, surveying it critically as Mary held it by an ear; "it's a retriever."

"Oh, Tom, will you have it? You can keep it out of doors. Mamma never says no to you."

"I don't mind if I do. You walk on, and I will run back with the brute."

But "the brute" refused to leave Mary, so the two went back together, gave the pup, christened by Mary "Waif," in charge at home, and then set off at a run to make up for lost time.

When they reached the Forrest's they

found the young men busying themselves on the tennis ground. Tom joined them, and his sister went indoors.

Mary explained the cause of her late appearance. Miss Forrest laughed over the account of Tom's correction, and smiled at Mary's tender concern for a strange puppy. Mary did not care to dwell upon it, and asked her sisters how long they had been there.

"A long time. We have been looking at Amelia's Swiss sketches," said Effie. "They are lovely."

"May I see them?" asked Mary.

Miss Forrest had no objection, and they had just opened the portfolio when the young men came in.

"I hear you have been administering justice with an unsparing hand, Mr. Tom," said Miss Forrest.

"I nearly drowned a little beggar."

"Poor fellow! Weren't you rather severe?"

"Not at all. I am the one to be commiserated," said Tom, looking at the splashes on his clean flannels.

"Oh, I think he quite deserved his punishment. Boys are so cruel, and the children about here are such a very rough, low set."

Mary averted an indignant face.

"It was only a pity I didn't drown him out and out when I was about it, wasn't it?" returned Tom.

Miss Forrest laughed, and handed him a cup of tea, telling Sydney to pour out for himself and Mr. Sims, and rejoined Mary at the portfolio.

Many of the sketches were very pretty. Miss Forrest had been well taught. She knew how to handle the brush, and could produce what Ruskin would have called a "very respectable article." But her trees were not individuals—one pine had sat, or rather stood, for a whole forest; her mountains were marked by a great similarity of

geological disturbance, and the snow painting did not equal M. Loppés. Still Mary envied her skill in manipulation, and said so.

"You should go up to town and take a few lessons from my old master. His terms are rather high, but one does not mind that if the teaching is worth it."

"I am afraid there is a lion in the path."

"Certainly it is a long way to go, but I don't suppose there are any good teachers in the north. I might ask Mr. Barritt when he comes to see us, in case you think of taking lessons."

"Thank you," said Mary. "What I should like best would be to join a sketching class. Our country is so charming."

Miss Forrest smiled a superior smile.

"There are some nice little corners," she admitted, "but there is really no stretch of country that would make a picture. Just look at the uninteresting outline of those hills,

if one can call them hills. They always remind one of a railway embankment."

"I should have thought it possible to find a good subject somewhere," said Mary; and as she did not wish to quarrel with Miss Forrest, she was thankful to hear Sydney propose adjourning to the tennis ground.

"I want to show Effie my roses, if you can spare her for this set," said Miss Forrest, as they left the house, and Gertie asked to join them.

"Then we shall be just four," said Tom. "Polly and I will play you two."

Mary's tall, lissome figure was suited to the game, and she thoroughly enjoyed it, and played well.

"Now, Polly," prefaced Tom, "if you don't play up, it will be the worse for you. We'll go in for a love set, and take little Sims down a peg."

"Shall I serve?" he went on. "No one tread on my cigar-case. What did you do

that for?"—Mary had returned a ball into the net.

"I shan't be able to do anything if you bully me," she replied.

"Bully you? I'm proud of you. I want you to show off. Look alive!"

"Deuce again—plague it!" muttered Tom, having placed a ball too cleverly just outside the line.

"Vantage in—game."

"Now, Polly. Sims will send you easy balls. Rattle them back."

Mary, who was always liable to lose her temper when insulted by an easy ball, did rattle it back with such force as nearly to upset Mr. Sims, an injury which his partner presently revenged by sending one which caught her right on the eye. He ran forward with many apologies, and begged her to wait until it was better. But Mary, holding her handkerchief to it, and saying laughingly, "I've got one left," skipped back to her place and insisted on playing out the set.

It ended at six—three, and Tom could not resist the temptation of rallying Sims on being beaten by a lady, "and a one-eyed lady, too."

"I couldn't be so ungallant as to beat a lady," pleaded Sims. "How could you expect it of me?"

"I didn't, I assure you," retorted Tom.

"Never mind, Sims," said Sydney, "we made a good fight. Miss Elwood is the champion lady player of these parts."

Meanwhile the others had arrived on the scene, and Effie and Gertie formed a set with Tom and Mr. Sims.

Effie played quietly and carefully, and found her partner very attentive. Too much so for Tom, and he remarked to her on the way home —

"I wonder you could stand that little Sims making goat's-eyes at you in the way he did."

To which Effie indignantly replied —

"He didn't do any such thing. But I see that whatever Mr. Sims does is wrong."

CHAPTER IX.

An arm of aid to the weak,
A friendly hand to the friendless,
Kind words, so short to speak,
But whose echo is endless:
The world is wide, these things are small,
They may be nothing, but they are all.

WAIF soon repaid the attention bestowed upon him in his new home, and, though he still displayed a limpness of leg and had an undignified habit of wagging not only his tail, but every member of his body, he gave promise of turning out a handsome fellow.

Though he went by the name of Tom's dog, he evidently looked upon Mary as his mistress, and was her constant attendant in her walks.

Some two or three months after his rescue, as she was passing through Brentham with Waif at her heels, she recognised in front of her the boy from whom she had bought him. He turned down a back street and disappeared through a passage.

A sudden impulse led her to follow. An old Irishwoman stood smoking at the entrance and directed her to the right door.

No one came to open in answer to her tap, but she heard a cry of "Coom in!" from inside. This was dreadful. Mary had a horror of intruding, and felt more inclined to run away than to march straight into a strange house; but the order was repeated in a sharp tone, so she raised the latch and opened the door a little way. A woman, with a child in her arms, came to it.

"I beg your pardon, miss. I thought it was one of the neighbours. Coom in, please."

"I called to ask if it was your little boy that sold me a puppy?"

"You'll be Miss Elwood, I expect? Will ye sit doon?" and the woman dusted a chair with her apron, remarking as she did so, "Sluts never want for clouts.—What'n a dog, miss? I ken nowt about the poop. We had a one, but I set Mat out to drown it. It was no good starvin' the poor thing."

"It must be the same. I begged it of him. I want Mat to see what a fine dog he is growing."

"He never said nowt about sellin'—not he. Come here, Mat—dost hear, lad?"

Mat came forward unwillingly from a corner where he had been teasing a small brother, and stared at his clogs.

"He might be a help with the childer, a big lad like him; but he's nothin' but a worrit!" said the woman, indignantly, as cries rose from the corner. "Hold thou noise, bairn.—He's just a fair nuisance, is Mat."

"You must try the other plan, and see

how useful you can be, Mat," said Mary, kindly. "It's ever so much better. Now look at my doggie—isn't he a nice fellow? I am so much obliged to you for letting me have him."

Mat was so far propitiated as to glance at Waif out of the corners of his eyes.

"Ye may think I've a bonny set to keep things straight, Miss Elwood, what with five childer, and him bad." As she spoke she indicated "him" with a nod, and Mary for the first time perceived a man lying on an extemporised couch of boxes and chairs. "Will ye speak to him, miss?"

Mary went up and expressed her sympathy.

The poor man looked up languidly, and said complainingly—

"I's fearful bad o' the heed the day. There's a great lump at the back. I get no rest for it day nor night."

"He'll never be no better," put in the

wife. "The doctors can do nowt for him. It's the spine of the back, they say, from the hot work at the mines."

"Furnace work," explained the man.

"I am very sorry," said Mary. "I am afraid that noise tries him," she added, hearing a clatter of wooden clogs on the pavement outside.

"Ay, there's a vast o' childer in this ansteed, and the noise is somethink arful. But we can't make a better of it. There's allays a something," observed the wife, philosophically.

Mary looked sympathizingly at the poor man, who lay with his eyes closed and his hand pressed to his forehead.

"Can he take his food? Does he eat meat?" she asked.

"I daresay he takes what he can get, poor man—a sup tea or a few broth. It's not often we see a bit of meat in oor hoose."

"Do you think—would you mind my send-

ing him a little dinner sometimes?" ventured Mary, much more afraid than she need have been of making her offer, for begging was the rule and independence the exception at Brentham.

"I'm sure, miss, we'll be obliged to you."

"He ought to have everything that will do him good," said Mary, looking kindly at the invalid, and holding out her hand to him.

"Ye'll not be long in coming back?" he whispered, as he held it.

"No; I'll come again very soon if you like."

"He finds it lonesome lyin', and anyone looking in for a bit crack puts the time off," said the wife. "Thank you kindly for callin', Miss Elwood. Ye do take after your da. I remember him well. Eh, what a kind man he was!"

"I take that as a great compliment," said Mary, smiling.

"He was good to the poor. I can tell you

he was sore missed. How suddent he got away at the last, poor man!"

Mary liked to talk of her father, but she could not bear any allusion to his death, so she called to Waif, shook hands, and went away.

"What's the matter, Polly? You look as if you had lost a sovereign and picked up sixpence," remarked Tom at the dinner-table the same evening.

"Do I? I beg your pardon. I was thinking of a man that I saw this morning. He does suffer so much, and there he lies all day in a room full of noisy children. I met an old friend to-day, Tom!"

"Anyone I know?"

"Someone who remembers you very well."

"Who was it?"

"Waif's old master."

"Oh, that little beggar. It was very inconsiderate of you, Polly, to rouse our curiosity. Poor Effie is quite crestfallen.

She thought it might have been somebody else."

"No, I didn't," said Effie, crossly, colouring.

"There *is* somebody staying at the Forrest's. I forget his name," said Tom.

"It is Mr. Barritt, the painter," vouchsafed Effie, brought down from her high horse by her love of imparting information.

"We shall be sure to hear about his visit," said Mary, laughing, but not ill-naturedly.

She proved to be mistaken, however. Mr. Barritt's visit was short, and Miss Forrest made no allusion to it afterwards.

Mary was surprised, but she did not give the matter a second thought, and had almost forgotten Mr. Barritt's existence, when it happened a few weeks later that a Mr. Burns, formerly clerk at the bank, called to see Mrs. Elwood.

Mary was the only one at home to receive him, and the good man sat down on the

corner of his chair and gazed with wondering admiration at the handsome young lady that he remembered as only a lanky child.

Mary asked him about his family and his new situation, but she found it hard work to keep up a one-sided conversation, and it struck her that a pause might awaken her visitor to the duty of bearing his part. It had the desired effect. Mr. Burns drew his hand heavily down his face, rubbed his eyes and looked up, red and staring, as if he had been suddenly startled out of a sound sleep. This attempt to excite cerebral activity proving a failure, he ruffled up his hair at the side, set his knees apart and rested his hands on them.

Success followed. A happy thought struck him.

"You'll likely have heard that Miss Forrest is going to be married, Miss Mary?"

"No, indeed, I haven't. Is that a fact?"

"So they say. To an artist; as poor as a

rat he is, too. The old gentleman is against it, but he ain't to be asked."

Mr. Burns now looked quite waggish.

"We hear a good many things in Brentham that are not true," said Mary, gravely.

"I had it on good authority. It's a likely thing, too. Miss Forrest is getting up in years, and it's time she was looking out for a husband if she don't want to be an old maid."

Mary listened coldly, and, thinking that she had avoided Charybdis only to fall upon Scylla, brought back the conversation to the old channel; and, having exhausted the subject of his children in inquiries as to their age, appearance, and accomplishments, was greatly relieved when Mrs. Elwood came in.

Mary deemed it probable that Mr. Burns' communication was founded on fact, but she heard no more until, a month or so later, Effie came in from a call at the Forrest's, radiant and important, and bursting with news.

"What do you think, mamma? Amelia is to be married in the spring, and she wants me to be bridesmaid."

"Do you say so, my dear?"

"Yes, to Mr. Barritt. I thought there was something between them. Did *you*, Mary? You don't seem surprised?"

"I heard it some time ago. I didn't know that it was true."

"You never told us," complained Effie. "That's always the way you do, Mary. You are so close."

"I didn't ask to hear. And if people bring reports to me, I mean to be a terminus."

"You might give them for what they are worth."

"Not at all; that is just the way mischief is made."

"I am sure I am the last person to make mischief," said Effie.

"I have no doubt of it. What do you mean to wear at the wedding?"

"I don't know yet. I may be bridesmaid, mamma?"

"We will talk it over. I shall hear more about it from Tom."

This was exactly what Effie did not want, for she knew that if Tom heard that his *bête noire,* Mr. Sims, was to be groomsman, he would put his foot upon the idea of her being bridesmaid without the least regard to her disappointment. Her only policy was to expedite decision, so she attacked her brother that very night.

Tom laughed good-humouredly when she told him of the treat in store for her, adding, adroitly, "Do get mamma to make up her mind quickly. Amelia wants to know at once;" and, as the result of her manœuvre, she was made happy with a permission.

CHAPTER X.

Do you not know I am a woman? When I think, I must speak.

BRENTHAM was certainly a quiet town. Sydney Forrest called it a dull hole, his sister spoke of it as dead-alive, and Mary thought it a dear little place, not too much of a town to spoil the country, yet large enough to provide a fresh face occasionally.

In coaching-days it had been a market-town of some importance, but the railroad which had raised the town of Belchester, some fifteen or twenty miles off, from little more than a village to a large manufacturing centre, had carried thither much of the traffic

in country produce which had formerly belonged to Brentham.

It was a self-contained place, gossiping, of course; well up in the family history of its inhabitants, but suspicious of strangers, and visitors might come and go, having spent a winter or the summer months in Brentham, and hardly make an acquaintance or receive a call. Neither was there much visiting amongst the townspeople. In old days tea parties had been the fashion, where the elders sat round the card-table, and the young people looked at photographs or played Scotch airs; but now dinner parties were in vogue, varied occasionally by a musical at home, or even a dance, and the summer croquet parties had given place to tennis.

There was little society. The Forrests, one or two medical men and solicitors, the rector—an old man and a bachelor, and the Spencers, who lived on the other side of

the town, formed the whole of the Elwoods' visiting acquaintance in Brentham itself. Several wealthy coal-owners and a few county families lived in the neighbourhood, but they had little connection with the town, except as Poor Law Guardians and Magistrates.

The first Mrs. Elwood, a handsome and elegant woman, had been asked everywhere, and took her place gracefully and graciously in any circle; but after her death Mr. Elwood, though sought after as a man of cultivated mind and refined taste, had almost entirely withdrawn from society.

During his lifetime the present Mrs. Elwood had been included in the invitations—rarely accepted—to dinner at the large houses in the neighbourhood, but afterwards she was quietly dropped. This she did not lament on her own account, feeling more at home in her own set; but she grieved over the loss of society for her step-daughters.

Now, however, Brentham was all alive. The translation of one of the county members into the Upper House had made an election inevitable; and to inaugurate the campaign a public ball had been announced. Mrs. Elwood, Mary, and Tom were to go.

"I wish you were coming with us, Alf?" said Mary, the day before the ball.

Alf shook his head.

"Of course I know you aren't to be persuaded. And, though I should dearly like to have you with us, I should be sorry at the same time if you were to go, for, somehow, I feel sure the halo would not be so visible next day."

"Don't say those sort of things, dear," said Alf, looking grieved.

"I'm sorry, Alf."

Mary was silent for a few moments, then she said abruptly —

"Mamma is going to-morrow."

"Yes," returned Alf, irresponsively.

"I am quite sure mamma would not do anything she thought wrong, but still—I don't mean to say it unkindly—she isn't like you."

"So I often think when I see her sacrificing her own pleasure and going out all weathers to visit the poor."

"I am quite sure she is very good," replied Mary. "But as for visiting the poor, don't you think, Alf—not in her case, but very often—that it is with religion as with so many other things, that people are in love with the *name* rather than the *thing*. Now, one knows folks that talk about music by the hour, and yet would never stop chattering to listen to a thrush; and then again, Alf, the way they talk about 'culture' at our lectures!—*self-culture,* indeed—they should call it *self-cultus.*"

"Draw it mild, Polly," said Tom, who had come into the room and overheard the last sentences. "You look as fierce as a turkey-cock."

Mary laughed.

"It does one good to let off the steam. I do hate Brummagem in all its forms."

"That reminds me that Effie has been letting off the steam at the top of the stairs with most unearthly noises. Some gown she wants you to look at."

"Oh, my dress for to-morrow!" and Mary ran upstairs to examine her finery.

Some crumbs of pleasure had fallen to the share of Effie and Gertie in helping to decide upon Mary's attire. Dress was a subject that never failed to arouse Effie's interest, and her sister, glad to have her pleased and friendly, instead of jealous and disagreeable, allowed her to suggest and advise to her heart's content.

Great was the girls' excitement on the evening of the ball when the finishing touches had been put to Mary's dress, and she was allowed to go downstairs.

"You look charming," said Gertie enthu-

siastically, as she finished her inspection. "I don't believe there will be anybody as pretty as you in the room."

"She'll do," said Tom, approvingly.

"Mary looks lady-like, and just as she should look. That is all we want," said Mrs. Elwood.

"Mamma is afraid you will make me vain," laughed Mary.

"You needn't be vain," said Tom. "You couldn't hold a candle to the mater if she'd just let you pull that arrangement on her head a little to this side."

"What an eye you have, Tom. Will that suit you?"

"That's about it. Now we'll be off."

Mary's cheeks were a little flushed with expectancy as she entered the ball-room. Her soft pink dress suited her wonderfully, and many eyes followed her as she walked up the room with her brother. She was, however, too much taken up with observing on

her own account to notice admiring glances. An assemblage of human beings was always a source of interest to her. She liked to scan the faces of a crowd in the streets, and such a gathering as the present was interesting in the highest degree.

Mr. Forrest was there, portly and rubicund; Amelia also, whose dress showed an anxious attempt to reconcile æsthetic and political colours. Talking to her was Mrs. Swan, who looked more like a puffin than ever with her white lace arrangements in front; and making towards the group, with eyes right, frowning slightly in deprecation of embarrassing admiration, came Sydney Forrest, to the evident satisfaction of Miss Manners, who had no one but her sister to talk to.

Mary quickly recognised her acquaintances, but was more intent upon observing the new faces. She had, however, not much time to spend in looking about, for her programme

was quickly filled. Amongst the first to seek her out was Sydney Forrest.

"I believe you enjoy dancing as much as anybody in the room, Miss Elwood," he said, as he took her to a seat after dancing with her for the second time.

"I dare say I do. But I should like to rest and look about a little while."

"You like to feast your eyes upon grace and beauty. So do I. Look round, then."

Mary followed the direction of his eye, and caught sight of her reflection in the long mirror. She turned away her head, and her lip curled scornfully.

"I am enjoying this evening," said Sydney. "So much depends upon whom one dances with. Sometimes one has to victimize oneself. Witness your brother;" and Sydney laughed.

Mary could not forbear a smile as she saw Tom, grim and surly, offering his arm to Miss Julia Manners.

"I mean to have a waltz with Tom this evening," she said.

"He is a good pioneer; but he is too lazy to talk."

"I don't mind that. I like a partner that leaves his personality in his great coat pocket. If Maskelyne and Cooke would make a waltzing automaton, that would suit me as well as anything."

"Most ladies like a conversational man," said Sydney, "and people don't always talk about themselves."

"Most do, annoyingly so. Who is that?" she asked, suddenly, as a gentlemanly-looking man passed by.

"Haven't you seen him before? That is Sir Humphrey Stephens. He is speaking to Lord Sudbury, and the young man is the Hon. Charles Ketterworth, Lord Sudbury's nephew. They hope to pave the way for a few votes to-night, no doubt."

Sir Humphrey stopped to speak to one of

the stewards. Mary looked round, but turned away her head as she caught his eye. The next moment the steward came up and introduced him.

Mary had filled up her programme for the waltzes, and was not inclined to dance the next dance—a quadrille—so Sir Humphrey stayed to talk.

"I am so glad to meet you, Miss Elwood. I had the pleasure of knowing your father many years ago."

"Really!" said Mary, looking up with lively interest.

"What a pretty creature you are," thought Sir Humphrey.

"Yes," he answered, "I remember his teaching my brother and myself to throw a line when we were quite little chaps. He and my father were great friends, though they were political enemies. I am sorry to see *you* wearing the wrong colour," he added, smiling, and lifting his hands.

"I have not quite made up my mind to belong to either party, but I am afraid, if I understand Conservatism rightly, that I shall keep to this colour."

"What do you understand by Conservatism?"

"If you have a bird in the hand don't let it go unless you have a pretty good chance of the two in the bush."

Sir Humphrey laughed.

"But suppose the one in the hand is not worth having?"

"Ah! I suppose that is the question."

"It is 'nothing venture, nothing have.' You would not wish the world to remain where it is, Miss Elwood? Conservatives think that what was good enough for their fathers is good enough for them; *we* should like something better," said Sir Humphrey, amusing himself with trying to draw her out.

"I was reading some time ago about 'poetic veneration for age' being superstition

and puzzling over it. Don't you think people venerate old things because they have been objects of reverence to so many others? And isn't it worth while to make use of this and improve instead of changing, so that people may obey laws because they respect them, instead of from fear of punishment? Besides, it does seem better that they should have the habit of reverence cultivated, and consider some few things sacred."

Sir Humphrey was half amused, half interested.

Mary caught his expression, and blushed deeply. Carried away by the excitement of the evening, she realized for the first time, to her infinite confusion, that she had been discussing politics with an M.P.

Sir Humphrey saw her embarrassment, and said kindly —

"We could do with more reverence, especially in the North. We have some very sterling qualities, but we could afford to part

with a little of our self-assertion. Yes, there is a great deal of truth in what you say."

"It doesn't matter what *we* think, though," said Mary, still confused.

"Come, I can't agree with you there. We think it of great importance to secure the ladies' support. And if you ladies were not so terribly Conservative, I should be inclined to give you a vote."

"Ah, then I shall not wear your colours," said Mary, recovering herself and shaking her head saucily, "for I should not like that at all."

The waltz struck up again. Sir Humphrey had already wasted more of his attention than was politic upon an obstinate Conservative, and Tom came to look for his sister.

"What an awfully handsome girl that is," said a fair young man with an eye-glass and a moustache, to a dark young man, also with an eye-glass and moustache, as Mary passed them on her brother's arm, merrily joking

him about the assiduous nature of his attentions to the Misses Manners and urging upon him the duty of taking one of them in to supper. "I should say she is casting her pearls before swine."

"You wouldn't mind being in his shoes," retorted the dark one.

Mary drew Tom a little to one side, and stood to watch the moving crowd. But the light, the music, the general hum, and the continual motion were almost too much for her, and she suddenly found herself quite dazed, gazing mechanically at the people passing, and was obliged to rouse herself vigorously to the consciousness that she, Mary Elwood, was in a ball-room, and that the moving things before her were real men and women.

Mrs. Elwood left immediately after supper, and announced that she had enjoyed the evening.

"So have I," said Mary, with an expression that said more than her words.

But when she was comfortably settled in a corner of the brougham with her eyes shut, but her mind very wide awake, a recollection came to qualify her pleasure.

"What an absurd creature Sir Humphrey must have thought me! Fancy my talking politics with him!"

Then she began to think that she must give up society altogether if it were not permissible to show a real interest in anything, but bethought her of the alternative expedient of engraving monograms of P's and Q's on two of her bracelets. In her case, P should stand for "pretty prattle and pleasant platitudes," as an aim, and Q, as a warning, for "queer and Quixotic."

At this stage she broke into a little rippling laugh, imagining herself aping the conversation of Miss Manners.

"Who's disturbing my slumbers?" growled Tom, rousing himself from a nap, and looking at his *vis-à-vis*.

Mary composed her face into a most innocent expression of repose.

"One of you two is shamming, and I shouldn't think of accusing the mater. Drop that, Miss Polly, and get ready to bundle out, for here we are."

"How did you enjoy it?" asked Effie next morning, when Mary came down to a late breakfast.

"Very much indeed, on the whole."

"Mary made a great sensation," said Tom. "She picked up an Honourable to take her in to supper, and I saw her talking away to Sir Humphrey Stephens at the rate of a mile a minute. She evidently made an impression."

"Indeed, I am afraid so, of a certain kind," said Mary to herself.

Her thoughts had already reverted to Sir Humphrey, and caused the qualifying expression "on the whole."

"Sir Humphrey knew papa," she remarked.

"So he told me. He means to call, I

believe," said Tom, eyeing her narrowly; "to see if he can get a vote, I have no doubt."

"I don't think he is that style of man," said Mary. "He knows you are Conservative."

"Why shouldn't he be that style of man?"

"I think he is above those ways. But I don't know; it is very disgusting to think how little opinions have to do with votes."

"Guineas and beer!" said Tom. "But we leave all that to Sir Humphrey. We mean to win the day by the power of moral suasion. I shall begin to canvass directly."

"Are you pretty confident?"

Tom shook his head.

"It will be a tough fight. Pollister is not so well known here, and Stephens is a very decent fellow. I'd vote for him long before the other if he took the right side."

"I don't know enough about politics to be very eager. But of course I shall wear your colours."

"Of course you will. I shouldn't let you go out in any others."

"Not if you could prevent it, I suppose."

"Politics bother me," resumed Mary, after a pause, during which Tom's knife and fork worked vigorously. "It isn't pleasant to feel the length of one's tether. The whole subject seems such a mingle-mangle of theories and principles, and practical experiments, that I don't seem as if I could get sufficient grasp of it to make up my mind about lots of things."

"It is as well that you don't. Women pretend they understand everything now-a-days, and think they must have their fingers in every pie. A pretty mess they make of it when they get their own way. By the bye, Polly, I've a bone to pick with you. I believe you're going to turn out a regular blue-stocking; it's abominable."

"I don't care. I may wear my stockings as blue as I like if my skirts are long enough to hide them."

"Who says that?"

"Jeffrey, I think."

"'M. But I don't care what he says. Clever women are always disagreeable."

"Come, Tom, I won't allow that; often, perhaps, but always, I can't admit."

Tom smiled. He had not expected such a candid concession, and was only trying to tease.

"Oh, well," he said, "if a woman likes to line her pate she's welcome to do it if she keeps it to herself. In fact, any sort, even those bristling women with spectacles, is better than a fool like Miss Manners."

"After which speech, sir, the sooner you make yourself scarce the better. The Bank demands you."

"By the bye," said Tom, jumping up, "I laid a wager with Forrest who would be there first. It was a capital dodge for getting him to work."

"You mean fellow! I hope it was a heavy one."

Tom made a knowing grimace at her and left the room.

CHAPTER XI.

A good man's fortunes may grow out at heels.

THE election set aside all regularity in office and home. Tom was away canvassing in the country for whole days. He was met with eager inquiries as to his success when he came home, but would give no opinion about the chances of the contest, and generally answered, "Time will show. We leave crowing to the Liberals."

The nomination took place at Brentham, and the girls, who had never seen the Conservative candidate, put geraniums in their button-holes, and made an errand to the town

in the hopes of coming across him. But they chose their time ill, and saw nothing unusual, beyond a small crowd of children carrying a Dissenting Sunday School banner, and shouting in inharmonious chorus, "Hip, hooray! vote for Stephens."

Outside the Town Hall they espied Tom patrolling the pavement with his hands in his pockets. He saw them, and beckoned, but it was near lunch-time, and Mrs. Elwood was strict with the girls in the matter of punctuality, so after counter gesticulations and holding out of watches they continued their way homeward.

Lunch remained on the table an indefinite time on these canvassing days, but Mrs. Elwood had just made up her mind to send away, concluding that Tom was lunching elsewhere, when he appeared on the scene, bringing Sydney Forrest with him.

"Forrest and I are going out as soon as the waggonette is ready. We want something

to eat. I don't care what it is, but we must have it at once," announced Tom. "Well, girls, you were green to go away."

"You missed some fun, Miss Elwood," said Sydney. "It was grand to see your brother walk into that crowd."

"What was it?"

"A rowdy lot of fellows came up behind, when Pollister was speaking in the Market Place, and one of them caught him on the back with a rotten egg. I heard some one call out, 'Shame!' and the next thing I saw was the poor wretch in your brother's clutches, being shaken like a rat."

"How rash of you, Tom," said Mrs. Elwood; "you might have set up a free fight."

"No," said Tom, decidedly. "I knew what I was about. There would have been a fight if that rotten egg business had gone on."

"Tom is a host in himself," said Sydney;

"he thinks himself equal to any ordinary crowd."

"Don't waste time in talking, Forrest. Fall to."

As the election drew near, many were the surmises as to what it would show. Nothing could be got out of Tom, but Mary, who had watched him narrowly, gave it as her opinion that he was hopeful but not certain.

The ladies avoided the town on the day itself, but next morning the whole family went in to hear the result of the poll announced from a window of the Town Hall.

Tom escorted the party, but protection was not needed, for the streets were very quiet. Their colours provoked a few good-humoured hisses, and a small ragged urchin, some four years old, called after them, "You ould Tories," prefacing with a sound-grimace.

On the way Tom spied a recusant voter, and hailed him.

"Hullo! Robson. Why didn't you vote straight?"

"Well, you seeä—"

"No, I don't see. If you wanted butter all the time, why did you let me waste my breath offering you bread. I'll bet you'd made up your mind before I opened my mouth, you rascal!"

"Noä, noä. Ah says Ah'll hear what this yan has to say, and then Ah'll hear tother chap. And," scratching his head, "Ah just thought Ah'd vote for Sir Hoomphrey."

"The more fool you," replied Tom, and moved on, leaving the man chuckling and shaking his head, for Tom was one of those privileged people who could say what they liked without giving offence.

"I am afraid you won't do much as a canvasser if you can't administer butter, Tom," said Mary, who had been an amused auditor. "We north-country folk are as fond of it as chickens—you can't lay it on too thick. I

suppose it is because we are on such excellent terms with ourselves."

"So we have a right to be," returned Tom; "but if folks expect me to tell them so they will find they are mistaken."

By this time they had reached the Town Hall, round which the bulk of the population had assembled. Opposite lived the Elwood's family doctor, who had fitted up a small strip of garden in front of the house with seats for the convenience of friends.

Mrs. Elwood went indoors, and Effie, seeing Miss Forrest at the window, accompanied her. Mary and Gertie stayed outside, and Tom went across to the Town Hall. The counting of votes was a lengthy process, but the crowd was very good-tempered; the battle was over, and the people beguiled their impatience by cutting jokes upon their opponents. A red herring on a pole decorated with ribbons was carried through the crowd, followed by cheers and laughter, and here and there

street orators held forth to small audiences. Rumours were rife. First came the report that Sir Humphrey was in, and presently Sydney Forrest crossed the street to tell Mary that the Conservatives had it by a few votes. A shabbily-dressed woman overheard him.

"Ay," she said, vehemently, "they're countin' and countin' and tryin' to make it as wrong as ever they can."

But now a stir at the other side of the street attracted their attention. A large upper window was thrown open, and the Sheriff announced that Sir Humphrey had got in by half-a-dozen votes. Speeches followed, and the successful candidate was enthusiastically received as he came forward to thank his constituents. He was a ready speaker, and his pleasant face and self-possessed manner told greatly in his favour.

Mary was half inclined to turn traitor to her brother, and rejoice at the result.

Speeches over, the greater part of the

crowd dispersed. Mr. Pollister, an elderly man, with a melancholy face, left for the station with the Sheriff and a few others. Tom was standing outside the Town Hall, and Sir Humphrey came out and said a few words to him, to which Tom made some reply that provoked a laugh.

Then the baronet spoke again, and this time they both looked across the street. Mary saw that Sir Humphrey had singled her out, and coloured as he returned her bow with a smile, which she interpreted as a recognition of his "ball-room politician."

He made a move to cross the road, but at that moment a carriage drove up. In it sat a very stately lady, elderly, but still handsome; and beside her another, young and pretty, who nodded and smiled to Sir Humphrey. He shook hands with Tom, got into the carriage, and drove off.

By this time Mrs. Elwood was ready to leave, and collected her train.

As they passed the church the bells rang

out a merry peal. Mary had once been told by her nurse that the bells sang, "Come to church and pay attention," and whether they were ringing for a wedding, or an election, or an agricultural show, to Mary they still said, "Come to church and pay attention." Whatever the bells may have thought as to the suitableness of their directions at such times, they were obliged to ring at the command of Madame Bourse.

Mary loved the sound of the bells, but today she felt cross at them, and thought it hardly a proper occasion for a peal. She walked home with Mrs. Elwood and Tom, very silent and full of thought, hardly listening, even when Mrs. Elwood asked Tom what Sir Humphrey had been saying to him.

"Ah, Sir Humphrey is the right sort of man; his only fault is being a Liberal. He has given me leave to fish in his water whenever I like, and said something about shooting in the autumn, too."

"How well Lady Stephens looks," remarked Mrs. Elwood.

"Very well. She is a remarkably fine woman. Mrs. Percivale is admired, too."

Who Mrs. Percivale was Mary did not inquire; she walked along buried in her own thoughts.

So that was Lady Stephens? She had supposed as much, and why should it make any difference? But it did, and she was vexed with herself. What was Sir Humphrey to her? He was kind and agreeable, but so were many other people. If he remembered her, it was only with amusement; and she had not been in love with him.

So she told herself, and she was right. She was not in love with Sir Humphrey, but he had caught her fancy, and had occupied her thoughts the more because she was anxious to right herself in his estimation.

These feelings were soon shaken off, and in a day or two she was quite herself again,

though perhaps a little sobered by having discovered a possible source of future pain.

After the election, Brentham fell very flat, but the preparations for Miss Forrest's wedding soon furnished a little fresh excitement. Tom had consented to be groomsman, but his disgust was great when he heard that Mr. Sims had also been invited.

It was not diminished when, a few days before the wedding, the gardener touched his hat and said —

"Is it true, sir, that the next wedding in the town is to be from this house?"

"What do you mean?"

"Folks say that Miss Effie is to be married to that gentleman that is staying at Mr. Forrest's."

"Nothing of the kind. Who say so?" asked Tom, sharply.

"I've heard it from many a one. But I always say that I know nowt about it."

Tom could not think what could have given

rise to the rumour; but he determined to give Effie a bit of his mind, so he took an opportunity of joining her in the garden, and, after a few remarks, opened fire.

"How long has Sims been here?"

"A week," answered Effie, crimsoning.

"And how long does he stay after the wedding?"

"I don't know. Why do you ask me? Not long, I should think."

"I am glad to hear it."

"I don't know why you dislike him so much," remonstrated Effie. "He has done you no harm, and yet you are always having a fling at him."

"He's harmless enough as far as I'm concerned," said Tom, contemptuously, "and so long as he contents himself with making sheep's-eyes at you I am sure I don't care, if you're pleased. But you may carry your flirtations a little too far."

"How can you say such things, Tom!"

said Effie, angrily. "I don't flirt; and now I see why you dislike him: it's because he's polite and pleasant, and not a great disagreeable, rude thing like you."

"I'm glad you find him so. I have a reason, though, for what I say. I don't know how far you are to blame, but you have managed to set folks talking, and I don't choose to have his name coupled with my sister's. Not that he would be fool enough to propose. He knows we shouldn't hear of it, and I don't suppose you would have him either; but these sort of people don't always know their place, and if you encourage him, it may come to be more than a joke."

"You have no right to talk to me in this way," said Effie, almost crying. "How can I help people talking? I suppose you would like me to cut him in the streets. But it's no business of yours what I do."

"I beg your pardon, it is my business.

However, you need not take it so to heart," he continued, more kindly; "still, you must see that he isn't quite the thing, and you wouldn't like to be congratulated in Brentham upon your engagement to him."

Tom thought he had said enough, and left Effie to her meditations.

In the evening Mary noticed that Effie looked very miserable, and felt sure she had been crying. Mary had very strong feelings upon the sacredness of tears, and did her best to shield Effie from observation; but Gertie happened to see, and said, bluntly—

"What is the matter, Effie?"

She received no answer, and Mary, frowning at Gertie, went quietly up to Effie, and, putting her arm round her waist, asked her if she would not like to go to bed.

"Yes," said Effie, "my head aches."

Mary kissed her, and sent her off, promising to say good-night for her.

"What was the matter?" asked Gertie.

"Her head aches," answered Mary, in a snubbing tone; for she did not think that another's trouble should be the subject of brusque inquiry. She was, indeed, over-sensitive on this point.

"You may lay that at my door, I expect," said Tom, drawing Mary aside.

"How?"

"I was unkind to her this afternoon. We had a regular row."

"Oh, Tom, why?"

"I couldn't help it. I believe she is quite ready to throw herself away upon that little tinpot Sims. I had to put my foot on the notion. Fancy, Parker asked me about it!"

"I don't think he would propose," said Mary.

"I am not so sure. I wish this wedding was over, and he well out of the way."

"Effie likes him because he pays her attention. I don't think it will come to anything more."

"It mustn't come to anything more," said Tom, decidedly.

"Then have we all to ask your leave before we make any matrimonial engagement?" enquired Mary, saucily.

"I can trust you. If you are not in a hurry, I think you may do better; but still, if you like to make it up with Forrest, I might be brought to consent."

"Thank you, that is kind indeed," said Mary, laughing. "But I am afraid he is far too much taken up with admiring himself to have any admiration to waste upon me."

"Who talks about being charitable?"

"It was an unkind thing to say," acknowledged Mary, meekly; "but I believe it is true."

"He does admire you, though, and he was singing your praises lustily the other night."

"He might let it alone, then. I know the sort of things he'd say," she said, flushing.

"I hate that way men have of talking of 'girls.' I believe I would cut a man if I knew he talked about me as 'an awfully nice girl!'"

"Hoity-toity. How high and mighty we are!"

"Not at all. I don't mean that everybody that calls one a 'girl' does it rudely, but I have heard it used very offensively; and I am sure it could never have come to be the common term in the old days of chivalry."

"Perhaps women were different then," suggested Gertie, who had joined them.

"I am afraid so, Gertie. They have lowered themselves by looking out for admiration, instead of trying to deserve honour and reverence."

"You are pretty severe upon your sex, Polly; but don't you pretend not to care for admiration."

"I don't pretend anything," answered Mary; "and I'm not severe, but only very

sorry. I think our way of life is to blame for it. Most girls have such empty lives. They have no object to spend their time and thought upon, as men have; the things that they could do, and used to do in old times, are done for them now-a-days."

"What would you have them do?" asked Gertie.

"I don't know. We can't cook and spin now, so much the worse for us. Women were more useful in those days, and certainly more honoured."

"I'm thankful those days are over," said Tom.

"Ah! poor old Tom. You would have had to please your lady by doughty deeds, for you would never have won her by fair speeches."

"You don't know. I can be as spooney as the best of them, if I choose."

"Tom, I should like to hear you make a proposal!" cried Gertie, clapping her hands.

"Yes; how *would* you set about it?" said Mary.

"Oh! nothing easier. I put a flower in my button-hole, choose a moonlight night, and persuade her to come out. I mutter a few sweet words—not many—for my emotion is too strong for much speech—but I cast side-long glances and heave tender sighs. She blushes; I seize a moment when she seems specially impressed to look straight at her and say—'Dearest, be mine!' I seize her hand, it trembles, I throw a supporting arm round her waist, our souls meet in a long kiss—the deed is done."

"You would frighten her out of her wits if you made such eyes at her," said Gertie, holding her sides. "She would be likely enough to tremble."

"Not a bit—

Den into deir eyes I look tenderly, tenderly, tenderly,"

sang Tom, with an ogling accompaniment.

"But suppose she said—'No, I won't be yours?'" suggested Mary.

"Then I say—'I don't suppose you'd be worth having,' and cut my sticks."

"We shall see when the time comes."

"Who knows what this wedding may do?" added Gertie.

But the wedding was not destined to have any such result in Tom's case. The bridesmaid that fell to his share was Julia Manners. He was so thankful that it was not Miss Manners that he made the best of it, and acquitted himself, according to his sisters' verdict, fairly. But Miss Julia confided to a friend that she would much rather have had Mr. Sims, for he knew how to make himself agreeable; but, as for Mr. Tom, well, she "supposed he had done his best, for those great big people generally had very little in them."

Effie was a pattern of propriety, and Tom saw nothing to find fault with. But when the

wedding was over and the guests had left, she was so unsettled and irritable as to keep the household in a state of chronic discomfort. Mrs. Elwood excused her, attributing it to the excitement of the wedding and the loss of her friend, but her sisters found it very difficult to bear with her.

CHAPTER XII.

Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?

EASTER came at last. I measure time by the vacations, because they were Mary's landmarks. Though she liked to race through the months at other times, when she came to the vacations she would have been glad to pull up a little. But Time, disobliging as ever, only hurried the faster, and now it was Easter Monday, though it seemed but a day or two since Alf's return home.

"Hurrah! Maurice is going to Belchester, and he will take us on the way, if we can do

with him! ' cried Alf, flourishing a letter in the air.

"That's what it's all about," said Mrs. Elwood. "I dare say I can. When does he come?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"So soon! Then I really don't know, now that Sarah is ill and the masons are in the house. Why didn't he write before? Some young men seem to think they have nothing to do but to announce their pleasure."

"It is rather cool," put in Effie.

"Perhaps you will see what he says," said Alf, gently. "Another engagement fell through, and he wrote off at once to say that he would come here if quite convenient."

"As it could not be helped, that is another matter," said Mrs. Elwood, mollified. "Yes, no doubt we can manage it; but I do like people to be considerate."

"I don't see why he should be called inconsiderate when he couldn't write before,"

said Mary, who must always champion the absent.

"I didn't say that he was, since the circumstances have been explained," returned Mrs. Elwood, affronted. "I wish you hadn't always something to say."

Mary had nothing more to say during the meal.

"I hope you will like Maurice," said Alf, finding himself alone with her after breakfast.

"Why?"

"I think you ought to be friends for my sake."

"I dare say we may be. He used to be a very jolly boy, I remember."

"I am not at all afraid. Everyone likes Maurice."

"Ah, then, perhaps I shall make an exception, for I don't often like people that are made so much of."

"Is Maurice clever?" she asked, presently.

"Yes, he is a very good mathematician. You know he did well at Oxford. He might have stood even higher if he had given up all his time to reading."

"Why didn't he?"

"He boated and played football a good deal. He did quite well enough."

"Well enough!" repeated Mary, scornfully. "If I were a man with brains, I should never call it well enough unless I were a double first."

"I dare say not. But Maurice considered it quite as important to strengthen his constitution as to cram his head. He thought more of spending a useful life than of University honours."

"You are quite caustic in the defence of your chum, Alf. I believe you make quite a hero of Maurice."

Alf did not repudiate the charge.

"I can't bear heroes," continued Mary. "I have always the greatest longing to be a Mordecai."

"But Maurice isn't a Haman."

"The more pity that you should make him one. You are sure to spoil him if you make an idol of him."

"I hope I don't make an idol of him," returned Alf, gravely.

"Well, a hero, then," said Mary, snappishly.

"I think we won't talk about it. You don't know Maurice, so it is no use discussing him."

Mary saw that she had vexed her brother, and visited her discomfort upon Maurice.

"Very well. Then we will wait until this paragon of perfection comes," she said, provokingly, mentally anathematising herself as a cross-grained thing, but not willing to make the *amende honorable.*

Alf, patient and sweet-tempered as he was, looked gravely displeased, and said not another word.

When Mary met him again he was kind as usual, but she was conscious of the shadow of

the morning's difference and was more or less constrained and very unhappy. Still she perversely chose to nurse her discomfort, and to work herself into the belief that Maurice *had* come and *would* come between them, and was prepared to feel neglected and miserable when the beloved friend should arrive.

The day passed, and next morning Mary, who had all along known herself in the wrong, longed to make it up with Alf. But she brought herself to the point of seeking him just too late, and found that Alf had gone to the station to meet his friend. So the feeling of estrangement had to be reinstated until an opportunity should offer of despatching and burying it with due ceremony.

She occupied herself with writing letters until the sound of footsteps on the gravel drew her to the window. There were the two arm-in-arm, looking as delighted to be together, and as absorbed in each other as if they had been a pair of lovers.

"Alf has got all he wants now; it does not matter about me," she thought. But she prepared to go down, and was in the drawing-room with the rest of the party when Maurice came in.

He shook hands with Mrs. Elwood with the warmth of an old friend, then turned to Mary with a smile of pleasure. She felt that her manner was constrained and cold, and that Maurice noticed it; and she shrank back into a corner while he spoke to her sisters.

Unwilling as she was to be favourably impressed, Mary could not but admit that Maurice was a fine manly-looking fellow. His figure was strong and active, and his face, though hardly handsome, was full of life and character, with the light-hearted expression of one who is accustomed to receive pleasant influences from the outer world.

She watched him narrowly as he stood in an easy attitude chatting over old days with her step-mother, and apparently feeling quite

at home. Mrs. Elwood was as cordial as possible. Effie and Gertie looked pleased and animated, and Alf had eyes for no one but his friend.

"So you expect to take us all by storm," was the comment of the perverse girl, and she drew still further into the background.

The two friends went out together in the afternoon, and Mary had no opportunity of speaking to her brother. Indeed, she felt less inclined to do so, and began to make it up with herself instead, and to consider that she had not been so much in the wrong after all.

"What do you think of Maurice, Mary?" inquired Effie. "He isn't quite as good-looking as I expected."

"What do you mean by good-looking?" replied her sister.

"Well, his features are too square. He has very good eyes, though."

"I think he's very nice," said Gertie, enthusiastically.

"He is wonderfully easy to get on with," chimed in Effie. "Did you hear him telling me about his trip to the Highlands at lunch?"

"I wasn't particularly attending," replied Mary, indifferently. "I think you had better sit next him at dinner, as you find him so easy to get on with."

"Don't you want to?" asked Gertie, surprised.

"I like to keep my own place near Tom," she replied, shortly.

Mary was taken at her word, and sat between her brothers, grave and silent, while everybody else talked to Maurice, and Maurice talked to everybody. She cast an occasional wistful glance at Alf, but assured herself that under the circumstances it was quite unnecessary to make herself agreeable to him.

After dinner she ensconced herself on a sofa with a book. There Alf joined her as

soon as he came into the drawing-room, and, telling her not to spoil her eyes, took away her book, and began to give her an account of where they had been, and what old friends they had seen in the afternoon.

Presently Maurice's voice was heard —

"May we have some music? Where's Jonathan? I beg your pardon. We are so often David and Jonathan at Oxford, that I forget. Alf should have been David, I think, he often comes to my rooms with his stringed instrument to charm away the evil spirit."

"No, I am better fitted for a Jonathan," said Alf, looking at his friend with an expression of proud affection, that Mary resented as homage. "Mary, dear, what shall we play?"

"Whatever you like."

"Why do you never play operatic music?" asked Effie, who always liked to put in her word. 'Traviata' is very pretty."

"It is too voluptuous. It may do very

well for Italians who have nothing to do but enjoy themselves," replied Mary. "Let us have our 'Romance in F.', Alf. Beethoven is perfection, at any rate."

Alf took up his violin, and Maurice placed himself where he could watch his friend's face, for he said that music always made Alf imagine himself in heaven, and that he borrowed an angel's face in anticipation. Alf's love of music was rather part of his nature, than a passion. His playing was in character, refined, tender, and sympathetic. Mary had more fire, and was capable of greater pathos, for music carried her away, while it flowed from Alf in a gentle stream. But the two often played together, and the difference was rather a gain than otherwise.

"Oh! Alf," cried Mary, as soon as the romance was finished, "will you learn the Kreutzer? I will have a fit of practising at once."

"I don't think we can manage it, dear."

"But we will. Of course you can, and I love it so much that I should work at it till I had mastered it—after a fashion, I mean. Say yes," she pleaded.

"If you wish it, I will do my best."

"Oh! thank you, Alf. I do believe there is just time to write for it;" and she hurried out of the room.

Maurice had been an amused auditor and remarked —

"Miss Elwood does not let the grass grow under her feet.

"No," said Tom, "she goes in for enthusiasm. That piano will go all day now."

"I believe in enthusiasm," replied Maurice, whereupon Tom shrugged his shoulders.

Mary soon returned, and was called upon to sing. Her voice was pure and sweet, though not strong, and her style of singing simple and unaffected. The song she chose suited her well; the music was quiet and sad,

and set to a poem, not to rhyming twaddle. It began —

> We are born; we laugh; we weep;
> We love; we droop; we die!
> Ah! wherefore do we laugh or weep?
> Why do we live or die?

and ended —

> Oh! Life, is all thy song,
> Endure, and—die?

"The music is very sweet, but the words want the answer," said Maurice. "You should follow it with —

> Tell me not in mournful numbers,
> Life is but an empty dream,
> Life is real, life is earnest,
> And the grave is not its goal."

Mary took amiss the abrupt transition from her sweet plaintive minor, and answered irresponsively —

"The words are Barry Cornwall's."

Maurice said no more. He saw that she meant to keep him at arm's length, and judged that he should please her best by letting her alone. He was both puzzled and disappointed by her treatment of him, for he

remembered her well as an open-hearted, affectionate child, and was at a loss to conceive why she should have taken a dislike to him. At dinner the thought had come across him with a pang, that perhaps she had developed into a cold, proud beauty, spoilt by the admiration which he felt she must always attract. But in her eagerness about the Kreutzer Sonata, and in little speeches and looks during the course of the evening, too much of nature had appeared, and he thankfully put away the idea, and hoped that a few days would cure the coldness or shyness, or whatever it might be, which had so unhappily come between him and his old playmate.

Mary, also, was full of thought that evening. Self-reproach and self-will were struggling for the mastery. Alf had been so kind, so good-natured about the sonata, that she had more than once felt inclined to cry *peccavi,* and make it up with him. But that might have committed her to being agreeable

to his friend, and making one—so she put it —of Maurice's train. This she was the more determined not to do, that she felt herself not quite proof against the charm of his sunny temper. She could not be distant towards him long, but she kept herself more or less aloof, and made up her mind that if she should be obliged to yield the universal tribute of liking to the "hero," at any rate he should not know it. She could not call Maurice a prig, but, determined to find some occasion against him, she murmured at his unflagging cheerfulness, and told Tom that she would like to see him cross for a change, an unfortunate remark which drew upon her the suggestion that she and Maurice might "swap tempers."

A few words must here be devoted to Maurice, as neither Mary nor Alf can be trusted to introduce him, the one being as ready to canonize as the other to depreciate.

He was no genius—"the gods had not

made him poetical," but his clear head and strong common-sense had given him a weight at college that more brilliant men envied. Add to this that he was a lively companion and a good-natured and unselfish fellow, without conceit or pretension, and it can be readily understood that he was, as Alf said, a general favourite. Alf clung to him as the stronger and more effective character, while Maurice, on his part, looked up to Alf as far more unworldly and self-sacrificing than himself.

Maurice's was a buoyant and sanguine spirit. Alf, conscientious and diffident, was always fearing that he had not done his part, and feeling himself to blame while work remained undone; Maurice, more anxious to please than fearful of offending, went on his way with confiding hopefulness, and might have adopted as his motto Wordsworth's lines —

> Nought shall prevail against me, or disturb
> My cheerful faith, that all that I behold
> Is full of blessing.

CHAPTER XIII.

Oh, the little birds sang east, the little birds sang west!
And I said in underbreath, all our life is mixed with death,
And who knoweth which is best?
Oh, the little birds sang east, the little birds sang west!
And I smiled to think God's goodness flows round all our incompleteness;
Round our restlessness His rest.

"ALF, could you venture so far as my man's this afternoon?" said Mary, looking into the library one morning. "He thinks he is dying, and I can't do him any good. He is in a great state of mind," she went on, anxiously.

"Don't you think Alf ought to nurse his cold to-day? the air is rather damp," said a voice from the window, and Mary

for the first time noticed Maurice, who was sitting half hidden by the curtain.

"I don't think it will hurt him if he covers his mouth; but I wouldn't send him without an urgent reason," she replied, adding mentally, "I am not so inconsiderate as you think me."

"Oh, yes, I will go," said Alf; "unless I send you instead, Maurice. I promised to help Mr. Spencer at a cottage meeting to-morrow, and it is to lead the singing I am wanted, so that I must try to get back my voice."

"I certainly couldn't take your place there, but I shall be delighted to go this afternoon. Can you tell me anything about this man, Miss Elwood? Is he in your district? I didn't know that you did much visiting," said Maurice, looking as if the discovery had pleased him.

"I don't," replied Mary, quickly, "and I haven't a district. I happened to find out

this man because my dog once belonged to him."

Mary sent Gertie out in the afternoon to show Maurice the way to the house and leave him there.

He introduced himself as a friend of the Elwoods, and began to draw out the wife on the subject of her troubles.

"How is your husband to-day? I hear that he is very poorly."

"Ay, he's had one of his bad bouts. He pat in a fearful night, and he's vahy bad the morn. Some days he's a bit easier, other some he's warse; but I doobt he'll never be no better, poor man. He'll just have to look for another warld. It's all we can do to make sure of that."

"Yes, we must make sure that we are going the right way," was all Maurice said in reply. He had seldom found it advisable to encourage indefinite religious talk amongst the poor. "I am afraid you have found the

nursing hard work. You don't look strong," he continued, kindly.

"I'se nowt to crack on. You may depend it's a queerish thing to have him bad, and a sick child to nurse, and no one to do a turn aboot the hoose but myself. Not but that I'll say wor Mat's improved since Miss Elwood took to noticin' him. He'd do a vast to please her, but he's nobbut a hempie laddie, and he likes to play hisself. Ye should have seen the baby a month since, it would have pitied you. He was just like an alliblaster, and he was that tedy, he'd always have me nurse him. If it hadn't been for Miss Elwood I think I'd have gone clean daft."

"Did Miss Elwood visit you often?"

"Maybe two or three times a week when the bairn was bad. She coom in one day as I was nursin' him, and when she saw how I was fixed, she says, 'Don't get up, Mrs. Dodd,' and sits down on the stool beside me. I thought shame to let her sit on a stool, but

she's such a free lady, she doesn't mind where she sits. James was asleep when she coom in, but after a bit he woke hisself up and calls out to me for a drink. So Miss Elwood, up she jumps, and, says she, 'Give me the baby.' I says, 'He won't be quiet with you, miss.' 'We'll see,' says she, and she coaxes him that pretty, that he went to her quite natteral. He'd cry to go to her after that, and many's the time she'd nurse the bairn while I sided up the house and did my bit turns. It was just like sunshine, her coomin' in, and James, he is sore taken up with her?"

"Miss Elwood tells me that your husband has not been so well lately."

"He's kind of heavisome, poor man, There's no betterness for him in this warld. We needn't to look for that."

"Would he like to see me?"

"I's warrand he would. And ye'll not go away without makin' a bit prayer. He asked

Miss Elwood to make a prayer with him, but she was kind of fear'd. She says, "I'll read you a chapter, but I can't pray with you; I'm not good enough.' It pat her aboot sore. I says, 'Divn't fash yourself, Miss Elwood. You'll not be used with it. But if there's anybody sure of heaven, it's you'—I ken that, hooiver."

The woman led the way into a small inner room, where her husband was lying on the bed, saying—

"He couldn't bear the noise of the 'childer' so he just had to coom in here."

One of the "childer" was keeping him company, and set up a roar as its mother seized it roughly by the arm.

"Whisht. Thee'll get thee whips if thee don't whisht this minute. Had awa' oot."

The poor man raised his hand wearily to his head, then motioned to his wife to leave them.

Maurice found that it was the old story—

the foundation of sand, which had appeared secure enough in fair weather, felt to be unsafe now that the storm seemed to be approaching. Mary's distressed face had added to the poor fellow's anxiety and alarm, and now he hung upon every word as his visitor, in gentle and simple language, pointed out where his mistake lay.

Maurice did not stay long. He felt strongly upon the want of wisdom shown in making lengthy visits to the sick, giving them more than their minds could take in, and wearying them with long prayers.

So he soon said good-bye, and, after a few words with the wife, walked slowly home. And on the way he thought much about the object of his errand, and more about the strange, enigmatical girl who had sent him on that errand.

One anxiety was set at rest. Her heart was not spoilt; she was loving and lovable still. But it was poor comfort to know how

winning and kind she could be to others while she was so cold and stiff to him.

He found her alone in the dining-room. A book lay on her knee, but she was in a brown study, and did not raise her head when the door opened.

"A penny for your thoughts, Miss Elwood."

"You shall have them for nothing. It is as much as they are worth. If you want to know, I was trying to mesmerize two and two into making five, and to imagine a whole smaller than its part," she replied, in an offhand tone.

"Really! Have you succeeded?"

"Not quite to my satisfaction."

"Why do you want to do it?" asked Maurice, amused.

"Because I was reading that it was impossible, and I always wage war with impossibilities."

Maurice sat down without speaking.

"I am quite aware that it was silly, and that you think so," she said, wishing to break the silence, which was snubbing.

"No," he replied. "I was rather thinking that 'it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.' Why should you fight against the nature of things?"

"The nature of things! I do wage war against the nature of things," said Mary, impetuously. "The world is full of crooked things that I would put straight if I could. Just think of all the horrid things that are happening every day. Think of what poor animals have to suffer, let alone human beings. One feels sometimes as if one would like to be blotted out of a world where such things go on."

"But I don't include sin and its consequences in the nature of things," protested Maurice, earnestly. "What right have we, because we can't understand these things, to jump to the conclusion that God is less kind

than we are? It isn't fair? Where did you get your feelings of tenderness and pity?"

Mary looked up at him with a peculiar expression. She was not used to being brought to book in this way. But the glance satisfied her that Maurice spoke strongly because he felt strongly, not from a desire to press a point against her.

"I daresay you may be right," she replied, and changed the subject.

But although she brought Maurice's "lecture," as she called it, to a close, she was not displeased at it, and liked Maurice none the worse for speaking his mind. Earnestness always commended itself to her, and the people that she cared for least were those that had no opinions that they thought worth standing up for.

This short lecture filled her thoughts until she was quite impatient with herself. She found herself continually thinking over different things that she would like to say to

Maurice, and imagining what he would reply. But she was determined not to change her line of conduct towards him, and further conversation was held in imagination only.

The next day was his last, and, the afternoon being bright and warm, and Alf's cold better, Maurice proposed a walk, and asked Mary if she and Effie would join them. Mary was inclined to say no, but thought she ought to consult her sister first, and, finding Effie anxious to go, gave way, contenting herself with the protest, "I know we were only asked out of politeness; they would enjoy themselves much better alone."

The other three were standing outside the door when Mary came down. She went up to her brother, and put her arm through his. Effie made a move to go, and Maurice had no choice but to lead the way with her. If he was disappointed, he kept it to himself, and proved a very pleasant companion.

The two behind were uncommunicative,

until Alf broke the silence by exclaiming—"What a glorious day! I think this gives an answer to your song, Mary. How birds and flowers and everything seem to rejoice!"

"Please don't be sentimental, Alf. It isn't like you. How do you know the flowers enjoy being baked in this sun? And as for the birds, greedy things, of course they rejoice, because there are plenty of poor little gnats about."

It was hard upon Alf to snub him in this way. He rarely expressed his feelings in what Mary had chosen to call a sentimental fashion, but, after being shut up in the house for several days, the sweetness of the air and the beauty of the sunlit landscape struck him with fresh pleasure.

"I think you are not in a very good temper," he mildly remonstrated.

"I know I am not. And I have been horrid to you all this time. Me sorry, Alf.

I wonder what is the matter with me. I don't know what it is I want," she said, drawing a long breath and stretching out her arms—"the moon, probably. I always hope that some day I shall find out what it is, and get it. But I don't know; I think I should always be longing for something."

"You seem to live in the future, Mary."

"Why not? The future is tractable—one can make anything of it; but the present—well, one must take it as one finds it."

"But when your grand future dwindles down to an insignificant present, isn't it disappointing?"

"Ah, but to-morrow never comes. When the present is specially unsatisfactory, one can always indemnify oneself by imagining a still grander future. And the present *is* unsatisfactory, Alf. My life is a sort of jumble of patches, that won't make a pattern. The future is much more attractive. Let me cheat myself if I like."

"I wouldn't quarrel with you, dear, if only you would look forward far enough."

Mary fixed her eyes upon him thoughtfully, then a smile broke over her face.

"I like your idea, Alf—of a glorious future casting its light upon a dull, commonplace present, and making it beautiful and interesting. But," she added, sadly, "I don't see that light."

"Now," she continued, paragraphing with a change of tone, "let's talk of something else. I have great sympathy with that little boy that cried for the moon, but I do hold that he ought to have been whipped for making himself a nuisance to other people. So I shall keep my growls to myself and try not to be cross any more."

"Have you seen Maurice's photographs?" asked Alf, by way of starting the conversation afresh.

"No. His own, do you mean?" replied Mary, smiling a little to herself at the inevit-

able channel into which conversation must flow.

"Of his family. His mother is a very charming woman, and his father is my ideal of a country parson. You have heard me speak of his sister, too. I think you would like her. She is passing through on her way from Scotland, in a month or six weeks' time, and going to stay a night or two with the Spencer's."

"Perhaps I shall see her. Has Maurice got her photograph?"

"I should think so. I will remind him to bring them down this evening."

Maurice was nothing loth to display his family treasures.

"What a sweet face!" exclaimed Mary, involuntarily, as the photograph of a young girl was passed to her. "Is this your sister?"

"It is," said Maurice, looking greatly pleased at her warm expression of admiration. "And she is as sweet as she looks."

"I hope we shall see her when she comes to Brentham. Look, mamma," she said, going up to Mrs. Elwood, "this is Miss Hughes. She is going to stay a night at the Spencer's on her way from Scotland. I wonder whether you would mind asking her here for a day or two?" she added, in an undertone.

A request so modestly couched was not to be refused. Mrs. Elwood took up the idea, and Maurice was charged with an invitation to his sister.

"Is that you, Alf?" said Mary, waylaying her brother in the passage after he had seen Maurice to his room. "Are you in a hurry? Sit down a minute."

The two sat down on a window-seat.

"I am afraid you will miss David very much. Won't you feel dull?"

"Not unless *you* turn the cold shoulder to me."

"I never do that. Don't be spiteful, naughty boy. I thought we had made it up."

Alf smiled, and patted the hand that he held.

"I am sorry you don't like Maurice," he said.

"But I think I do like him," replied Mary. "Not enough to satisfy *you*, I dare say; but still, I do like him. At the same time, to be quite honest, I am not sorry that he isn't staying longer, for my own sake."

"Why, dear? It is not that I neglect you?" asked Alf, anxiously.

"No, it is not," said Mary, decidedly. "I am not so selfish and greedy as that comes to—not at the bottom, at least, though I allow I was huffy at first. Well, if you want to know, it is because I have been disagreeable to him, and made him dislike me"—

"He doesn't!" interrupted Alf.

"You think he is too amiable to dislike anybody? Well, made him think me a horror, then; and I don't feel comfortable to be in a house with people that don't like me."

To which Alf, not being able to hit upon the right thing to say, said nothing but "Silly child."

CHAPTER XIV.

> That very time I saw (but thou couldst not)
> Flying between the cold moon and the earth
> Cupid all armed. . .

THE house seemed dull after Maurice had gone, and duller still when Alf went back to Oxford for his last term. Mrs. Elwood found compensation in being at liberty to continue the spring cleaning. This meant a period of discomfort to the other members of the family, but the mistress was quite in her element. Arrayed in a cap of unusual dimensions (pulled well on for a protection against dust), and in a large black silk apron that had been her mother's, she hurried hither

and thither, key-basket in hand, looking after the workmen, making up bundles of clothes to give away, burning old letters, and superintending the dusting of books and washing of china.

The papering and painting was hardly over before word came that Miss Hughes was leaving Scotland on "Thursday first," as Mrs. Elwood phrased it, and would be glad to spend a day or two at Elwood Grange.

"Really, I wish it had been a week later," murmured the good lady; "I can't put her into the newly-painted rooms until the smell is gone, and Alf's curtains haven't come back, or she could have had his room."

"Tom can go there," suggested Mary.

"I don't like to turn him out."

"He won't mind. Shall I ask him?"

"You may if you like. If he doesn't fall in with it, she must do without curtains."

Mary took the first opportunity of asking her brother —

"Tom, Miss Hughes is coming."

"Well?"

"We want to put you in Alf's room. Have you any objection?"

"What's that for?" growled Tom.

"Alf's curtains aren't come back, so we want to give her your room."

Tom shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll move your things for you," she promised, "and you shall have your beloved stuffed animals and your skins and bones. I suppose silence gives consent;" and she was taking herself off in high feather, when Tom called after her.

"Here, Polly, I want you."

"Don't scowl so, or I shall run away."

Tom jerked his head impatiently.

"Here's Sims coming back."

"What for? When?"

"In a fortnight or so. As to what for, I'll be bound he's after Effie. What else should bring him again?"

Mary looked very thoughtful.

"I shall have to take strong measures to show him that he is not wanted at Elwood Grange, I expect," went on Tom.

"Suppose she should really have fallen in love with him. It would be very serious."

"Rubbish. It's what all young women have to go through, a kind of measles. They soon get over it. It clears the system, and does them no harm."

Mary smiled, but she still looked anxious and sad.

"I should not like Mr. Sims for a brother-in-law. But if the mischief is done, it may be too late to interfere."

"It's not too late so long as her name is Effie Elwood," said Tom, emphatically.

Mary ventured no more.

The matter of bedrooms arranged, Mrs Elwood wrote cordially to renew her invitation, and a day or two later the post announced the train by which the visitor would arrive.

"You must arrange about meeting Miss Hughes this evening, Mary," said her stepmother.

"I had better speak to Tom before he goes out then," replied Mary, rising slowly with her eyes still on the *Times,* in which she had found an interesting review.

She laid it down as she reached the door, and a few minutes later Tom, looking into the library, saw his sister standing before the cupboard, taking a bird's-eye view of its contents.

"You take your time, Polly."

"I know I came for something," said Mary, wrinkling her forehead; "but I can't remember what it was. Oh, of course, I wanted to speak to you."

"And you were looking for me in the cupboard?"

"No, it's not the larder closet," retorted Mary, whose spiteful memory retained a story of Tom in younger days investigating the

resources of the larder on the eve of a dinner party.

"Out with your business, if you haven't forgotten it!"

"Will you drive us to the station to-night?"

"Indeed I won't. That's what I call adding insult to injury. Here am I, turned out of my room for the sake of a simpering girl, and you have the cheek to ask me to drive the usurper to the house in triumph."

"Tom, you are even a greater bear than I thought you!"

"I'll let you know what it is to call me names, young woman," said Tom, seizing her round the waist. "I fancy bears get a good grip, don't they?"

"You're squeezing the breath out of me! Let me go, you great, rude bear!"

Another squeeze.

"Oh, Tom, you hurt, do let me go; Gertie will be waiting."

"Ask pardon, then."

"Ten thousand pardons. Let me go."

"Not so fast—now, please, kind Tom."

"Please, kind bear" —

"Very good!"

"Oh, *pardonnez-moi.* It was a natural mistake. Please, kind Tom" —

"Unloose the bars" —

"Unloose the paws" —

"You would like another, would you?"

"Tom! Tom! You forget what a great strong thing you are. Oh, unloose the bars."

Tom set his prisoner free, and she made her escape at once, turning round at the door to discharge her Parthian arrow—"*What* a bear!"

Tom had engaged himself to dine out that evening, which was his reason for not driving to the station; but he came home soon after the "simpering girl" arrived.

She was sitting on the sofa looking very tired, but doing her best to take her part in

the conversation, when he came in. He said "How do you do?" and then retreated to the other end of the room and read the newspaper, casting an occasional glance of curiosity at the visitor.

What he saw was a slight girl with an oval face and large grey eyes, shaded by dark lashes. Her mouth was small and sweet, and her whole face had a gentle, fawn-like expression which had won Mary's heart at once.

She was evidently feeling shy at being so suddenly introduced into a household of strangers, and tired out after a long day's journey, so Mary took pity upon her, and carried her off early to bed, returning to join Effie in teasing Tom, and suggesting that he should have his breakfast by himself, as he could never stand such a simpering face opposite him.

Tom failed to act upon the suggestion, and before going out next morning, he asked carelessly —

"Are you girls going to do anything to-day? There's nothing much going on at the Bank, so I can mark out the tennis-court this afternoon, if you like."

The offer was thankfully accepted, for marking out the tennis-court was an occupation that no one liked. And when the time came, Tom, having done the drudgery, thought he might as well reap the benefit of his labours, and played three sets. Then he strolled away, but returned with his cigar and lay down on the grass not far from the tennis-lawn.

Having no engagement that evening, he dined at home. But if Mary, who had been much surprised at his condescension in the matter of the tennis, thought that he was coming out in a new light and beginning to develop social urbanity, she was disappointed, for he was even more silent than usual, and sat apart with his paper in the drawing-room, taking no part in the conversation beyond

dropping an occasional odd remark which made his sisters laugh and Nelly Hughes smile shyly.

Mary had early discarded "Miss Hughes" as too formal and important for its subject, and, after avoiding any name at all until the plan became inconvenient, they agreed to call each other by their Christian names. The final step towards a friendship was taken when Mary invited herself into her visitor's room to have a chat before going to bed. She put Nelly into an arm-chair, and squatted down on the floor at her side. When she had made herself comfortable, and found a resting-place for her head in Nelly's lap, they began to talk.

"I wish you lived nearer to us, Nelly. You are a horrid little thing to be running away so soon; just as we are beginning to know each other. You can't think how badly I want a friend."

"Haven't you plenty about here?"

"None. Some acquaintances, but no friends—except Mrs. Spencer, and she isn't like a girl, you know."

"I wish we could see more of each other. I have so often heard of you, and I wanted to come here on purpose to see you, though I was a little bit afraid. I didn't think I was clever enough to be a friend for you."

"What a horrid thing to say!" protested Mary. "No, I used to admire people that could say sharp, sarcastic things, but I don't now. I like kind people, and so long as they aren't conceited I don't mind even if they are stupid. But I don't know that you aren't clever, and I am sure you are good, Nelly; now, aren't you?"

"No, not good"—

"Yes, I am certain you are. I know it by your face. You have the same expression as Alf."

"Your brother is very good," said Nelly, meditatively.

"Yes, indeed he is; too good, I sometimes think."

"Is your other brother the same?" asked Nelly, timidly.

"Oh, no, none of us are; unless, perhaps, Gertie."

Nelly said no more upon the subject, and Mary drew her out about her home, and found, with a mixture of amusement and impatience, that Maurice was the sum and centre of everything. Mary imagined herself tired of hearing of his perfections before Nelly was tired of telling them, and was quite ready to say good-night when her step-mother tapped at the door and reminded them that it was growing late.

"How have you slept, Tom? I hope you were pretty comfortable," said Mrs. Elwood when he came down to breakfast next morning. "I have not asked Miss Hughes to stay, so you can go back to your own room to-night."

"If you had consulted me I could have told you that I preferred to stop where I was for the present," returned Tom, ungraciously. "I suppose it is too late to ask Miss Hughes to stay now? She isn't in my way at all, and it is a pity she should go when the girls seem to have taken to her, and to be enjoying her visit."

"I don't know whether it is too late. I am sure you are very considerate."

Tom looked up suspiciously, doubtful whether the last words were intended ironically, but Mrs. Elwood went on innocently —

"She seems a nice unaffected girl, but I shouldn't have thought she would be one to take Mary's fancy. She hasn't much to say for herself."

"She doesn't equal Miss Manners," acquiesced Tom.

Always ready to carry out any suggestion of Tom's, Mrs. Elwood pressed Nelly to prolong her visit. But it was too late. She

was due at the Spencer's in the course of the afternoon, and had promised to return home the following Monday.

"We are going for a drive after lunch, and we shall drop the 'simpering girl' at the Spencer's, which will be a relief to you, Tom," said Effie, catching him in the hall before he went out.

"Couldn't you find a new joke? That begins to be stale. Let me see, this is Saturday; and I suppose you take the waggonette. Have you made up your minds where to drive?"

"We thought of going round by Barnley woods."

"Then you can give me a lift as far as the gate. I shall be fishing there this afternoon."

Tom took the reins as far as he went, but he never opened his mouth, and the girls behind quite forgot he was there, and laughed, and chatted, and joked as girls do when they are left to themselves.

After driving a mile or two along a shady road, skirted by a wood, through which the glittering river appeared here and there, they came to a small ravine. Beyond it was a stile, at which Tom drew up.

"Is this where you are going to fish?" asked Mary.

"Yes; would you like to come down through the wood. It will be jolly and cool this hot day."

"I am afraid Nelly won't have time."

Tom did not press the point. He shook hands with Nelly, and told the coachman to drive on.

"Stop a moment. Do get me a branch of that lovely may!" cried Mary.

Tom pulled out his knife, lopped off the nearest bough, and threw it to her.

"Here's a good bit," he said, cutting off a smaller sprig. "Anybody else want some? You?" and he thrust it in the direction of

Nelly Hughes, not vouchsafing to look her in the face.

She took it, and they drove off, while Tom, finding something amiss with his fishing-rod, sat down on the stile, where he was still at work when the carriage turned the corner and was lost to sight.

CHAPTER XV.

Go to; it is a plague
That Cupid will impose for my neglect
Of his almighty dreadful little might.

THE girls saw little of Tom the next week. If he dined at home he betook himself to the smoking-room in the evening, and when he was with his sisters he was such poor company that Effie complained to Mary that he was "so grumpy, he'd hardly answer a question."

"Is he?" said Mary, thoughtfully. Then her eyes lighted up with mischief, and she said, sinking her voice to a confidential whisper—"I'll tell you what it is, Effie, he's beginning with measles."

"No, Mary, not at his age!"

"We shall see," said Mary; and she walked off with a little chuckling laugh.

But though Mary amused herself with imagining such a thing as Tom's falling in love, she thought it quite too good a joke to be true, and, in fact, had put his grumpiness down to his anxiety about Effie.

She was punished for her bit of fun, for one indiscretion begat another; and Effie, after gazing intently at Tom across the breakfast table next morning, began—

"Mamma, has Tom ever had measles?"

"Yes. You all had them together."

Mary began to look uncomfortable, but Tom took no notice, beyond a further contraction of brow, and worked away steadily at his toast and bacon.

"He seems all right," said Effie, taking an observation on the state of his appetite. Mary thought he was going to have them again."

"Polly shouldn't make a fool of herself," said Tom, flushing angrily.

Mary saw that she had hit nearer the mark than she supposed, and was very sorry to have touched a sore point.

"I was only in fun, Effie. I thought you would have known that," she hastened to explain, and bore patiently her sister's rebukes for saying what she didn't mean.

Whatever Tom's experiences might be, they did not make him any more indulgent to his companion in misfortune.

If he had deigned to put Effie's *penchant* for Mr. Sims' in the same category as his own infatuation, he would have said, "We are a couple of fools, and the sooner we come to our senses the better." Tom would have spared no pains in order to cure himself, and intended to spare none in making sure that Effie's attack should not leave permanent results.

After growling about nothing for several

days, he got something to growl about, for Mrs. Elwood accepted for his sisters an invitation to join the Forrests and Spencers in a picnic to Harburn Peel, and Mrs. Barritt and Mr. Sims were to be of the party.

Tom and Alf (who had just taken his degree and was expected home for a week or so) were included in the invitation, and had been left to answer for themselves.

"Didn't I tell you, Polly? Of course I'll go, though I don't suppose I am wanted. It's an abominable nuisance! I meant to keep out of the fellow's way, in case I might be tempted to wring his neck."

"You needn't go. Alf can look after us."

Tom vouchsafed no answer, and said no more until the morning of the picnic.

"How do we drive, Polly? I suppose if the Forrests take their trap and we the waggonette, that will do?"

"Yes; there are only ten."

"Then we take the Spencers and the girls. The Forrests' man will be enough."

"But there is Alf!"

"He can go with the Forrests."

Alf's wishes were seldom consulted. It was taken for granted that whatever arrangement pleased other people would please him. But Mary sometimes put in a word for him. Now she said —

"I am sure he would like to go with Mr. Spencer."

"Then send Gertie with them."

"No, Effie. Gertie would rather be with us."

"Bother you; that won't do," said Tom, frowning. "Then I'll go myself."

"My dear Tom, the thing's as broad as it's long."

"What thing, Gertie?"

"Don't be so rude. If you are stupid enough to make a fuss about Mr. Sims, you will simply drive Effie into taking up with him."

"I can mind my own business," replied Tom, snubbingly.

Mary shrugged her shoulders, and was silent.

Tom's plans, however, were disconcerted at the last moment by Sydney Forrest, who brought word that the dog-cart was waiting at the gate for Effie, and offered himself to take her place in the waggonette, instead of Mr. Spencer.

"Yes, my dear. I told Mrs. Barritt that you would go with her," said Mrs. Elwood.

"Tom wants to go," said Effie, looking nervously at her brother, who had impressed his wishes upon her in very decided language.

"There's not room for both, I am afraid," said Sydney.

"Go along, Effie. Don't keep them waiting," said Tom, smothering as best he might his indignation at being "done."

"Will you get in, Miss Elwood?" said Sydney, opening the carriage door.

"I was going to drive," she replied.

"Are you?" said Tom. "Well, I suppose we shall reach Harburn some time today. That is, if we don't break our journey on the way, and our necks into the bargain."

"Ye had better come and sit next me, if you are afraid," said Mary, who feared that Sydney might inflict himself upon her.

Tom did so, and after some delay they set off,

> Six precious souls, and all agog,
> To dash through thick and thin.

But smack the whip did not go, until Tom possessed himself of it by force. In his hands it became such a persuasive weapon that the horses were more than once on the point of running away; and Mary, finding this joint driving too exciting for enjoyment, gave up the reins, and was at liberty to use her eyes.

So far their way had been along the coach road, looking over an open reach of country,

including the river and line of hills beyond. Now they left the Brent valley and entered what might have been a miniature Alpine gorge, with steep little hills and quarried cliffs topped with fir woods, shutting in the road.

Up and down hill they went until they came to a long ascent. Here Mary turned the gentlemen out to walk, and took the reins again. At the top they passed through a region of peat and cotton grass—a high plateau running into moorland, with nothing to strike the eye but the chimneys of a lead mine and group of miners' cottages close by. But soon they caught a glimpse of the wooded Harburn valley, and, to the satisfaction of Jehu, discovered the Forrests' carriage not far ahead. Tom urged on his smoking steeds, and came up with the other party before they had taken the last basket out of the carriage. After driving some fifty yards further to a farm-house, he followed

the others, who were walking on towards the Peel. The woodland path led along the edge of the cliff, overlooking the deep glen. The high banks were densely wooded to the top on either side, and far below flowed the river Hart. It was a grand scene, and Mary longed to enjoy it away from jarring sounds. But Effie was discussing with Mrs. Barritt the comparative merits of ulsters and fur capes, and Sydney's laughter and Mr. Sims' asseverations, in a high, squeaky voice, rose from behind. Mary made her escape from the party, and ran on. When she was some distance ahead she seated herself amongst the heather, on a projecting slab of rock, and looked down upon the gleaming river.

The sound of footsteps made her turn round. It was Alf.

"You unsociable child!" he said. "Why do you run on by yourself?"

"I quite forgot that it might be viewed in such a light," replied Mary. "Let us wait.

I couldn't enjoy it with all that jabbering. No one seemed to care about the view."

"You and I can walk on quietly."

"No; don't let me seem unsociable."

They waited until the others came up, and then Mr. Spencer joined them. If Mary had to talk instead of feasting her eyes in silence, there was no one she liked so well to talk to as Mr. Spencer.

He was not a general favourite with young people. A little of the sternness of the schoolmaster clung to him still. But to the Elwoods he was especially kind, for their father's sake, and the didactic manner which most disliked was a charm in Mary's eyes. She was grateful to anyone who would take the trouble to give her information, for, with an eager desire to think rightly, and a want of confidence in her own judgment, she often felt the need of a mature understanding to advise with and lean upon, and sadly missed her father.

No one could take his place. Mr. Spencer was kind, and would go thoroughly and patiently into any question, and now and then Mary ventured to bring before him some theory or some one of her "probable opinions," but she was afraid of being troublesome, and only attempted it at long intervals.

She need not have been so modest, for Mr. Spencer felt a great interest in her, and was pleased to be consulted. He had sometimes directed her reading, and his first question as he joined her and her brother was —

"Well, Mary, how did 'Butler's Analogy' go down?"

"I finished it a long time ago," she replied. "I was very much interested. But at the same time I didn't like it," she added, diffidently.

"Why not?"

"It left a horrid impression on my mind, as if I were nothing but a bit of a system. I

dare say it was foolish; but it made me think of that line of Tennyson's about Nature —

So careful of the type, so careless of the single life."

"That was a pity," said Mr. Spencer. "It shouldn't be so. I must prescribe a course of the microscope, I think. When we see the wonderful care bestowed upon beautifying the minutest forms of life, then we may believe that there are systems within systems, and that our individual lives are as carefully planned as the larger scheme of which they are a part. What do you say, Alf?"

"Yes, I think it shouldn't trouble us that our Father has concerns beyond our ken, in which He lets us play an unconscious part."

"You take higher ground again," said Mr. Spencer, looking across to him with a sympathetic smile.

Mary slipped to the other side of Mr. Spencer and put him in the middle.

"That reminds me that I was discussing that subject with Hughes the other day," re-

sumed Mr. Spencer. "What a genuine, large-hearted fellow he is! And he has such a clear head, and so much strong, sound sense. I always knew that boy would do well."

A peculiar smile flitted across Mary's face. "What! Mr. Spencer bitten with hero-worship too!" And then the thought passed through her mind that if they were right, and Maurice was really so sensible and clever, it was a pity that she had been disagreeable, instead of making friends with him, for then she might have asked him about some of her puzzles.

The two men continued their conversation, while Mary, divided between listening and looking about her, only half understood them, and wondered at her brother, who always professed himself too stupid to enter into discussion with her and yet could talk with intelligence and good sense upon matters which were quite beyond her.

After half a mile's walk, a ruin came in sight, and a few minutes more brought them to their destination—a square piece of grass, once covered by an ancient stronghold. At the further side part of the wall remained, and a picturesque bit of the Peel rose some twenty or thirty feet from the ground.

"I'll see what sort of a view there is from the top," said Tom, surveying the ruin.

"No, Tom, you will break your neck," protested Mary.

"Bless me, if that ash tree got up without breaking its neck, I should think I can."

"I think you might bring the whole thing down with a run," said Mr. Spencer, and, as Mrs. Spencer added her entreaties, Tom desisted from the attempt.

"This old Peel has seen ugly enough work in its day," observed Mr. Spencer. "It is supposed to have belonged to an order of Friars in old times and, later, to have fallen into the hands of freebooters."

"If they drove cattle all the way from Brentham I'll bet they were ready for something to eat by the time they got here," remarked Tom.

The ladies took the hint and spread the cloth in the shade on the short, soft turf. Lunch was soon ready, and if the spirits of the freebooting company lingered in their old haunts, surely they shook their heads over the degeneracy of the times in which a fine young fellow like Tom could be satisfied with chicken and veal pie and gingerbeer!

The next part of the programme was to make the descent to the river.

"This is a very steep bank. May I give you a hand?" said Alf, to Mrs. Spencer.

"There will be no difficulty with Gertie if we set her a rolling. Clear the course," said Tom, seizing her by the shoulders.

Gertie screamed.

"He shan't tease our dear old mollusc," said Mary, putting a protecting arm round her waist.

Tom turned to Sydney —

"I say, Forrest, what a pity we haven't those spring-heels here. We might go down at a bound."

"I should be very glad if I might have the pleasure of taking Miss Elwood with me," replied Sydney.

"I'll be bound she would hold tight," returned Tom.

"Your humour is somewhat broad," remarked Mary to her brother, colouring with displeasure.

"Tender point, eh?" he asked, *sotto voce.*

"Not at all. I suppose you can't understand. Now, Tom, I'll race you down the cliff," she added, in her ordinary tone. "Give me a good start, and don't come on the top of me."

"Let me go first," said Sydney, "to be goal-keeper;" and he ran down.

"Now, Polly, look sharp. "I'll give you ten yards."

"Take care," said Mary, stooping to pick

up a beetle of the kind popularly known as "soldiers."

"What is it?" said Tom, peeping over her shoulder. "You ridiculous girl!"

"I know *you* would have enjoyed treading upon him," said Mary, looking up at him archly.

This reminded Tom to turn round. Effie and Mrs. Barritt were walking together, and Mr. Sims and Mr. Spencer brought up the rear. He would have preferred to keep Effie in front of him and Mr. Sims behind, but was fain to be content with the present arrangement.

"I know you have an affection for beetles," resumed Tom. "But depend upon it it would be a benefit to the community to put that fellow out of the way. He is a most disreputable character. Look at the colour of his nose."

"We'll give him a chance of reforming, at any rate," said Mary, depositing him on the

bank, "though I don't love beetles much after all. Fancy crawling when you have wings to fly."

"It strikes me you mean to crawl down this bank."

Mary set off, and was caught up by Tom near the bottom, and dragged along by him the rest of the way. He left her to sit down and recover her breath on the shelving rocks above the river and wandered off by himself along the stream.

Sydney looked after him for a moment, then sat down by Mary, saying —

"Someone remarked to me the other day how very good-looking your brother was."

"I didn't know that he would be called good-looking, but I like his face."

"Perhaps you don't care for good looks? People often don't care for what they have got themselves."

"Indeed I do care. Nothing gives me more pleasure than to see a beautiful face, or,

what is the same to me, an interesting one. I have been struck several times lately."

"Fortunate individuals!" exclaimed Sydney, with a theatrical sigh.

Mary could not help laughing.

"Not at all," she said. "If I could have my way with them I should put them all in spirits."

"You might put *me* in very good spirits," returned Sydney, who could not resist so obvious a pun. "I didn't know that you cared so much for good looks before," he continued, twirling his moustache. "But really, now, you don't mean that about your being struck?"

Mary was afraid that Sydney was beginning to fancy that he had the "measles," and answered carelessly —

"Yes, I do. Ask Mrs. Spencer. Here they come at last.—Didn't you nearly lose two of your chicks the other day?" she said, leaning back, and holding out a hand to her friend.

"Yes, indeed; I had to set up my feathers and spread out my wings."

"I must get Robbie a nosegay. Come with me," said Mary, getting up.

They roamed along by the side of the stream, Sydney following with Gertie. He made several attempts to speak to Mary again, but she contrived to keep close to Mrs. Spencer. At last he found an opportunity, and, on the plea of helping her to get up a root of beech fern, he bent down and said —

"Miss Elwood, you are very unkind."

"I'm not," returned Mary, shortly.

"Yes, you are. You run away from me. You won't let me speak to you."

"What do you want to say?" she asked, sharply. "Here, Gertie, come and see if this is the genuine article," she went on, scrambling up the bank with her trophy.

"That's the way you always treat me,"

muttered Sydney; and he turned on his heel sulkily.

"What's the matter with Sydney? How cross he looks," said Gertie.

"I think he fancies he is poorly. No. I'm only in fun, Gertie. Please don't say I said so," added Mary, remembering that she had got into a scrape before.

"What a nuisance it is," she thought, "that people must fall in love, or fancy themselves in love. Here are Effie, and Tom, and Sydney"—and she went on to congratulate herself on having escaped the epidemic.

This brought Sir Humphrey Stephens to her mind, and she congratulated herself the more, thinking what a good thing it was that he was married, or she might possibly have undergone the unpleasant experience. She was wandering in the direction Tom had taken, and began to wonder why he had marched off by himself, and whether he was

really in love; for since her unfortunate remark he had taken pains to be as lively as usual.

"Mary, we won't go along there," said Gertie; "it isn't safe."

"What do you mean?"

"Look up there. Don't go any further."

Mary followed the direction of her sister's eye, and saw that the cliff had a projecting eave of tree-root and soil, fringed with heath and poly-pody.

"My dear child, I should think it has been like that ever since you were born," said Mary, laughing, and passing under it.

"I shan't venture. I'll wait for the others."

"Very well. Then I'll hunt up Tom."

As Mary turned a corner she came in sight of the object of her search, sitting on a boulder and watching the water eddying past. He was in an unusually meditative attitude, and, though he was noted for the quickness of his ears, Mary contrived to steal a march

upon him, and throw a stone into the river close by.

Tom jumped up, shook the splashes off his coat, and, lifting a large stone which Mary could hardly have moved, made a pretence of returning her favour.

"Sit down again," she said, as she came up; "there is room for both of us on that stone."

Tom helped her up, and sat down beside her.

"What are the others doing?" he asked.

"Pottering about."

"Who's with Mrs. Barritt?"

"I don't know. I never trouble my head about her. I am so glad she is married; I never could get on with her."

"I know there's not much love lost between you."

"No. She goes to people's houses and makes fun of them afterwards; and she is always running down people and things. Do you like her, Tom?"

"I wasn't asking from any particular affection for her; but I want to know who is with Effie?"

"I haven't seen her lately."

"Now, Polly, I'll put you into the river if you tell me any fibs."

"Don't, Tom; you will have me in. You've got more than your share of the stone already."

"Where's Effie, then? Did they all come down to the river?"

"I didn't see them."

"I'm not going to be diddled in that way," said Tom; and he began to retrace his steps, leaving Mary to follow as best she might.

Having satisfied himself that the objects of his anxiety were not with the rest of the party, he began to mount the hill with rapid strides, making a short cut to the path that he thought they had probably taken. He slackened speed as the sound of voices caught his ear, and, turning a corner, came to

a full stop before Effie and Mr. Sims sitting on one of the boulders that strewed the banks.

They looked remarkably foolish, and tried to make some indifferent remarks to him, but Tom did not listen, and said abruptly —

"Effie, you will find the others by the river. Sims, you and I had better go up and see about the fire."

Effie went down the hill. Tom mounted the path at the top of his speed, stopping now and then for Mr. Sims to catch him up, and when they reached the ruin, turned on him and said fiercely —

"What does all this mean?"

"What does what mean? I—I—don't know what *you* mean," replied Mr. Sims, making a feeble effort to be jocose.

"This dangling after my sister. If you mean nothing by it, it is unpardonable; and if you mean anything, it is worse."

"I—I am sure I don't mean any harm."

"Then, once for all, let this come to an end."

Mr. Sims dropped behind, and began meekly to collect firewood. Nor did he venture to address another word to Effie during the rest of the afternoon, and Tom flattered himself that he had nipped the flirtation in the bud.

CHAPTER XVI.

I will instruct my sorrows to be proud.

"How you did snub Sydney this morning, Mary!" remarked Effie at early dinner on the Saturday following the picnic.

"Did I?" answered Mary, carelessly. "Well, I can't help it; he bores me so. I believe I like Mr. Sims better."

"No accounting for tastes," growled Tom.

"But I think you were rather rude to him," continued Effie nervously, anxious to avoid the subject of Mr. Sims.

"Leave me alone, child; I don't care if I was. It will teach him not to be so bumptious."

The meal over, Mary retired to the library. Tom had taken the waggonette, and gone fishing with the Lawsons. There was nothing to call her out; the day was hot and sultry, and she felt listless and indisposed to exertion. So she threw herself down on the sofa, and ran her eye over the bookshelves lining the room.

The library was Mary's favourite resort. It was full of tender associations and memories of happy hours, from the table in the window where she used to sit with her father, to the books whose backs she knew so well. One bookcase contained her father's classical library; that was locked. The other was open. Dickens and the Waverleys filled the top shelves; below were other standard works, and two or three bottom shelves were devoted to theology. As a child, Mary knew the position of almost every volume, and could lay her hand on them at once for her father, though she had little acquaintance with the

contents, and had never even satisfied her curiosity as to what Bishop Jewell could possibly have done to call first for a public apology, and then for a defence of it.

That afternoon there was nothing which especially attracted her, so she took up Lamartine's "Jocelyn," which, begun for the sake of the French, had now become too interesting to lay aside, though it always made her miserable.

She found that she had set herself a hard task, for the oppressive heat made it difficult to exert herself to realize the scenery described. And, to add to her discomfort, Effie, on the other side of the wall, was practising a gavotte with an air that repeated itself like the flowing pattern of a wall-paper.

After enduring it for some time, too lazy to move, she heard a thrush calling her into the garden. So she went out, and turned her steps towards her favourite hawthorn tree. But the withered petals of the may-blossoms

strewed the ground beneath it, and the brown elm-seeds had made a little autumn on the lawn; so she went on towards the stream, and, spreading out a shawl in the shade, lay down on the bank—where we first found her—and gave herself up to be fêted.

What a pageant it was! The sunshine, streaming through the trees, sparkled from every smooth surface of blade and twig, and twinkled in the stream, while the trickling of the water made a gentle lullaby.

She lay there for some time in a delicious state of quiescence, passively receptive, while lovely colours and siren sounds ministered to her. But the energy of her nature asserted its claims in course of time. She could not be satisfied to spend the whole afternoon in this manner; so, unwillingly, she stirred herself up on to her elbow, and took up her book again. A favourite retreat in the woods at no great distance came into mind. She could drag herself so far; so, taking her shawl into

the house, she left the garden. Her way lay through a couple of fields into a wood, along a cart-road that ran through both wood and field, connecting a country lane with the old coach-road that passed Elwood Grange.

Hollies and other evergreens had been planted under the larger trees, and close by the path, hidden from it by a screen of shrub and tangle of honeysuckle, was a little nook which went by the name of "Mary's arbour." Here she settled herself, and began to read. Time passed quickly as she became engrossed in her story.

The air was very still, the birds had ceased to sing, and scarcely a leaf stirred. Mary was sitting at the end of her log, with dreamy eyes fixed upon a clump of ferns in front of her, thinking of poor Jocelyn in his great loneliness, how he dwelt upon the kindness of his old housekeeper and the affection of his dog, and made the most of his intercourse with his little flock, trying to cheat

himself into the belief that his heart was not so utterly empty as it would declare itself.

She was roused from her reverie by the loud chirp of a startled blackbird, and heard the sound of approaching voices. She knew she was quite hidden, and peeped through the green trellis-work to see who was coming. It was Sydney Forrest and Mr. Sims. They were talking vigorously, and as they passed Mary heard Sydney say, with a ring of irritation and scorn in his voice, "Marry her! I should think not. She's well enough to flirt with, but she's a regular Turk; her family find it hard enough to get on with her."

Thought seemed suspended for a moment. Slowly she took it in. The words must apply to herself. That *he* should speak of her thus! That such things should be said of her! That it should be possible for them to be thought! She could have killed Sydney—she had killed him already in her heart; but the cruel, stinging words she could not kill.

For a few moments she seemed rooted to the spot, then sprang to her feet, and, casting one hurried glance to see that the two were out of sight, rushed along through the wood. Her only impulse was to get away as far as she could from everybody and from herself—her wounded, lacerated, smarting self. She took a quiet lane which led on to the hills, and tore along it. Evening was drawing near, but she pressed on and on, her only desire being to reach the moors which lay at no great distance on the hill-tops. At length she had put half-a-mile between the nearest farm-house and herself, and stood on the moorland with no prospect but a line of deep purple hills in the distance and the dark brown eminences close at hand.

The scene was wild and lonely to her heart's content. It had been growing darker and darker. The sheep had sought the shelter of the low walls of rough stone. No sound was heard but the mewing of a

solitary plover, until a low muttering of thunder fell upon the ear. The thunder rumbled again more angrily, and Mary was startled by a long waved line of intense light reaching from the zenith to the horizon and radiating light over half the sky. It was followed by a sharp, rattling peal, then by a flash which seemed to come out of the ground beside her. The strife had begun in real earnest. Mary, with her head thrown back, and her arms stretched out and hands tightly clasped, stood, like the goddess of the storm, revelling in the wild fury of the scene and watching intently as the flashes followed in quick succession, sometimes like fiery flying serpents, sometimes like flames leaping up from a lake of fire; now accompanied by large tracts of luminousness, now by mounting bands of light, revealing the forms of the clouds.

She felt no fear, though but for a row of stunted hawthorns planted on a ridge of

earth, and all bending in one direction, she was the most prominent object on the hill. She was carried away by a sympathetic transport as the heaven rolled out its wrath and flashed forth its vengeful fire. But the storm moved further away, and though the sky was still lighted up incessantly and the thunder growled angrily, it was now to Mary feeble and altogether inadequate. The rain was pouring in torrents, and she became aware for the first time of streams running down her face and neck. Cold water has proverbially a subduing effect, and as she suddenly realized that she was alone on a desolate hillside in a gloomy twilight, broken only by the weird, fitful light, a great horror fell upon her, and, holding at bay with all the force of her will the thought of the distance between herself and the nearest human dwelling, she plunged through the wet grass, sprang over the uneven ground, and rushed down the hillside as if a thousand fiends were behind

her. Panting and breathless, she reached the foot of the hill, and ran along the muddy road. Soon she came to the wood, and the trees were lighted up to a golden green as she reached the gate. It was the nearest way home, but she must pass her afternoon's retreat. That she could not, would not, do, so she made a long *détour,* and went home by the road, thankful for the darkness as she passed near the town, though no one would have recognized the dripping, draggled creature out alone on such an evening. She went in by the back door, and cook greeted her with uplifted hands and open mouth —

"Eh, Miss Elwood! We couldn't think what had got you. The mistress was in a terrible fidge. Well, did you ever, and you out in it all! And you've had no tea," a consideration of first importance in cook's mind.

"Never mind tea. I don't want any," said Mary, as soon as she could speak. "Let

them know that I have come home wet and gone to bed, and send Hannah up in a few minutes for my clothes."

Cook was rather taken aback by the unusual shortness of Mary's manner, and stood looking after her retreating figure; then, having given vent to her feelings by sundry exclamations of "Well, if I ever!" proceeded to carry out her instructions.

Mary went up to her room, and locked the door. She began by pacing up and down, repeating in a fierce whisper, "I wish I were dead! I wish I were dead!" But her walk had tired her out, and soon she threw herself down on a chair, folded her arms, and looked straight before her. "Everybody hates me; I hate myself. I wish I were dead!" she repeated again.

"You have nothing to do but sit here in your wet clothes," said a voice in her heart. For a moment she caught at the suggestion, then, saying sternly to herself, "This is

childish," she rose and undressed. There was a knock at the door, and Mary, having assured herself that it was the servant, gave out her wet things and locked it again.

A minute after came another tap, and she called out—"Who's there?"

"It is I, Gertie. I have brought you some tea."

"I don't want any, thank you."

"Do have it, Mary. I have buttered you a piece of toast. Do let me in."

How Mary longed to let her in, and feel Gertie's arms round her, and her kisses upon her cheek, but she steeled herself to reply coldly—

"No, thank you, Gertie. I want to be alone."

Gertie retreated in silence, and Mary heard her go slowly downstairs, and was stung with remorse at the thought of the kind sister coming up on her errand of love and going away rebuffed and disappointed. But her in-

domitable pride came to the fore, and she turned angrily upon her softer feelings. What! should she so soon prove false to herself! And she rejoiced that she had conquered her weakness, or, as conscience would have it, bidden farewell to her better nature.

She went to bed, but not to sleep; far from it. Her brain was busier than ever. She strove to shake herself free from the clinging sense of humiliation and misery; dashing herself wildly against the unalterable past. She would imagine herself the victim of a horrible nightmare. Last night she had lain down without a care on her mind; why should it be different now? But the few last hours would not be blotted out; she could not "force Time back the road of yesterday;" the hateful words she could neither alter nor annihilate. So she began to face her position. "Her family find it hard enough to get on with her." They should not suffer

that hardship long. Mary would do nothing rash; she would not be childish, or hasty, or impulsive. She proceeded to turn carefully over in her mind the various careers that are open to young ladies. A nurse—that would have commended itself strongly to her at another time, but, in her present state of mind, pity and sympathy had given way to bitterness and misanthropy. Besides, she was not strong enough to carry it on she feared, and might be sent home to recruit. That would not do. A governess—Mary thought she might make a teacher of average capabilities; for determination to do well might overcome the drawback of inexperience. A school she shrank from, but in a private family she thought she might be comfortable—happy was not in her vocabulary just then.

That point decided, she tried to go to sleep, but it was not until the burst of song

that greeted the rising sun had died away, and she had listened for some time to the gentle warblings and twitterings that followed it, that "Nature's soft nurse" kindly "steeped her senses in forgetfulness."

END OF VOL. I.